

ENDING VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES

a training program
for pastoral care workers

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Prepared for Ecumenical Family Ministries

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Families consist of people living in intimate relationships, intended to foster life. Ideally, family life supports health, a sense of well-being and the growth and wholeness of all its members. But the tragic fact of family violence demonstrates that within intimate relationships one person may attempt to exercise power over another. Attempting to gain power over another person is inherently violent and abusive. This is so particularly for women, children and the elderly who may be physically or economically dependent on an abuser. Their lives can be threatened and even obliterated by such an exercise of power.

Family violence takes many forms. It ranges from verbal and psychological abuse to physical abuse, which is a crime, an assault. The term "family violence" refers to many kinds of families; extended families, single parent families, blended families, as well as the nuclear family. Some of the dynamics of family violence occur among intimates who do not even identify themselves as family. People living common-law and people who do not live under one roof can still suffer violence at the hand of their sexual partner, parent or child. Some gay and lesbian people have identified patterns of violence occurring in their relationships that are similar to patterns of violence seen in more traditional family structures. While some concerns that are

particular to these relationships are beyond the scope of this project, it is important to acknowledge the suffering of the victims of violence in all kinds of families and it is important to learn to listen to them. We listen in order to learn.

At times Christian churches have contributed to the silencing of victims of family violence. The churches have perpetuated attitudes and beliefs that have helped justify the patterns of violence within families. In our ministries we have failed to attend to the needs of victims of violence, putting other concerns before their health, safety and well-being. In confessing these failures, we commit ourselves to becoming agents of social change.

This training package is an attempt on the part of an inter-church group, Ecumenical Family Ministries, to address some realities that volunteer and professional pastoral care workers face when the fact of family violence is recognized.

The purpose is three-fold:

- To raise the level of consciousness about the extent of family violence in our communities and in our congregations;
- To help people who work in a church context, either as professionals or volunteers, identify

and be sensitive to the possibility of violence in families with whom they have contact; and

- To offer some practical suggestions for effective intervention in violent family situations, when providing pastoral care to the victim or the perpetrator.

No one can become an expert on all the issues related to family violence, and it is not the purpose of this resource to provide training for experts. But people working within a church context are already confronted, probably daily, with victims of family violence. They need to be conscious of the problem, able to identify abuse, and capable of making more effective interventions on behalf of the victims.

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Many groups and individuals made significant contributions to the project. Some of these groups and their publications are included in the Resource Section of this book. Innumerable community agencies, church groups and individual readers across Canada shared their experiences and their research with us, and for their assistance we are most grateful. We want to stress the contribution made by the members of the women's shelter movement. Through their work they have broken through the silence that isolated victims of family violence, particularly women and children, and have helped bring the issues of the victim into the political conscious-

ness of Canadians. The shelter movement deserves increased support in return for its tremendous effort.

But most importantly, we want to acknowledge the courage and strength of the family violence victims who have spoken up for themselves and on behalf of future generations. They are making brave steps towards breaking the cycle of violence. Their witness to justice can no longer be ignored.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES

Christian ministers and pastoral care workers want to share with their communities the sense of well-being and joy that is at the core of Jesus' message; the reign of God is at hand. Basic to that joy is a sense of freedom, physical integrity and psychological health. As Paul proclaims:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

*Galatians 5:1**

Christians affirm the dignity and worth of each person as God's creation, fulfilled through Christ's incarnation. We recognize the necessity of just and loving relationships in support of each person's dignity. Justice and love are witnessed in the committed and caring relationships between friends, between parents and children, between aged parents and their adult children, in intentional community relationships and through covenant relationships between loving partners. Such relationships are fundamental to Christian life and are symbolized in baptism wherein a new family, our Christian family, receives new life.

Families can be important building blocks with which to build a personal and collective sense of ourselves as a free and joyful people. This is one

reason why family and youth ministries are a major focus in church life.

Yet throughout biblical history certain family relationships were not liberating, but hostile and destructive. Jealousy and hate between brothers result in murder in the story of Cain and Abel. Sarai turns against Hagar, the mother of her husband's child. Joseph's brothers are ready to kill him. Tamar is the victim of incest and is raped by her brother, Amnon. The Levite's concubine is raped and tortured in the Book of Judges. Her master cuts her body into twelve pieces and sends them throughout Israel. Clearly, a false idealism about family life must be tempered by the biblical record.

Ambivalence toward the biological family is also expressed in the New Testament. Jesus is quoted as saying, "And call no man Father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (*Matthew 23:9*). Also in Matthew's Gospel we hear the question, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" and the answer in, "And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he (Jesus) said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother'" (*Matthew 12:48-50*). Jesus proclaimed the coming of God's reign, through which all of our social relationships are radically transformed.

The Christian Family, a Shalom Community

We operate out of a Christian ethic of peace within a wider family context that includes all people to whom we are committed, with or without a biological relationship. This ethic is based on the scriptural injunction, "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (*Hebrews 12:14*). The peace promised in Christ and the peace we strive to achieve in our relationships is rooted in the Hebrew idea of *shalom*, an individual and communal wholeness.

Gail Golding, in the Women's Inter-Church Council resource *Hands to End Violence Against Women*, expresses *shalom* as our vision:

"Love and justice which combine to create a condition known in Hebrew as 'shalom,' translated into English as 'peace,' has always been central to the biblical witness. Scriptural use of the word peace usually implies individual and communal wholeness and health, as well as the absence of conflict. In the Hebrew scriptures the word 'peace' is not used to distinguish among the various manifestations of wholes. It includes prosperity, security, and the spiritual completeness of the covenant. The military and economic peace of the community are one with the bodily and spiritual health of the individual."¹

Where Our Vision Has Failed Us - Confronting the Facts of Family Violence

Women are repeatedly told that they are included in the injunction "Strive for peace with all men." But the non-inclusive phrase "all men" highlights the fact that the sexually abused girl, the assaulted woman and the abused elderly woman have not been included. This peace is not extended to everyone in the church. Our language reflects and influences our thinking; people, particularly women, who suffer violence are made nearly invisible in our churches.

Violence usually refers to overt acts of coercion and brutality; to physical assaults. However, in families where some women, children, and elderly people are economically dependent on an abusive member of the household, psychological or emotional abuse also carries with it an implicit threat of violence. "I can treat you badly," the abuser thinks, perhaps only unconsciously, "and you have no choice but to accept it because I have the power and control in this household." Social conditions, such as the disparate earning power of men and women and the lack of affordable housing and child care, contribute to the power imbalance. Religious and ideological beliefs of male supremacy, in the household and in society, reinforce the power imbalance, as do certain psychological factors and perhaps the superior physical strength of the abuser.

In a family system where there is a marked power imbalance between the members of that family, abuse that would be considered little more than very bad manners in another context, carries with it the implication of violence. The abused woman, child, or elderly person feels that they must accept the abuse, in fact, that they must accept *any* behaviour of their abuser, even physical assault, because their abuser has power over them.

So, while we articulate the belief that every person has a right to live without the threat or fact of violence, family violence remains a terrible fact of life in our churches just as it is in the community at large. Looking over a few pews in the average congregation, it's likely that some of the women there are being emotionally or physically abused. It was reported in Canada's House of Commons that at least one out of every ten married women is being physically abused by her husband, and recent research suggests that overt violence occurs even more frequently, perhaps in as many as one in eight marriages.² This pattern of abuse is not restricted to married women, but is also experienced by women in intimate relationships with men to whom they

are not married. The violence occurs among people in all classes, races and walks of life, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Child battering and neglect is another widespread problem that persists in church congregations just as it persists in the Canadian population as a whole. Public health authorities suggest that parents are among the greatest killers of Canadian infants.³ We have little knowledge about the scope of child battering because acts of violence against children are often condoned under the guise of "discipline." However, we do know that people who are actively involved in religion have a greater than average adherence to the kind of rigid, authoritative beliefs that are typical of abusive parents.⁴

Concerned about the extent of sexual abuse children suffer, the Canadian Government set up a commission to research the problem in Canada. A national population survey was conducted, after which the commission concluded that "sexual offences are endemic, that a significant number of both females and males have been victims of these acts, and that children and youths are disproportionately at risk."⁵ The survey indicated that most assaults first occurred when the children were young, half of the offenders were members of the family or close relations, most of the offenders were male, and the assaults usually occurred either in the home of the victim or the offender.⁶

Recently the scope of abuse and neglect of the elderly is being addressed within our communities. We know that victims of elder abuse are among us in the pews, perhaps even members of our own family. Abuse of elderly persons includes confinement, isolation, neglect, and verbal and emotional as well as physical abuse. It also includes incidents or long term practices of financial abuse, the withholding of money, fraud, theft and misappropriation of money. The Manitoba Council on Aging made a groundbreaking study of the problem of elder abuse and estimated that 2.2 per cent of the elderly popula-

tion are subject to abuse, and that 70 per cent of abused elderly people live with the abusing caregiver who is likely to be a family member.⁷

The Christian churches need to acknowledge the evil of this violence that persists within our communities and congregations. As a community, we have been wilfully blind to it, and sometimes we have been accomplices by silencing its victims. We have often refused to intervene where we suspected violence because we were afraid of the repercussions; we had not yet confronted our own fears, or we simply didn't know how to intervene effectively. But by avoiding the issue of violence, we have failed to show compassion to the victims and have stifled the righteous anger that is ignited by injustice.

The churches' failure has not only been in the area of pastoral care; it has been in its theology as well. Churches have failed to examine how their bias toward patriarchal systems has clouded their vision of a true peace. Feminist theologians in particular have uncovered a theological bias that puts the maintenance of the family unit before the health and safety of women, children and the elderly within the family. ** The hierarchical, patriarchal structure of the traditional North American family mirrors the institutional structures of many churches, and has been buttressed with theological arguments about men's role as head of the family, in contradiction to a theology of covenant and mutuality in human relationships.

And we have failed in our prophetic role to encourage the social change required so that everyone can remain free from the threat or fact of violence. We have often remained silent about the evil of violence suffered by women, children and elderly in their most intimate relationships.

It is time we lived up to our vision.

Scriptural Foundations for a Renewed Vision

The dignity and worth of all persons is affirmed throughout the biblical story. The chosen people consisted of a people seeking liberation from slavery and oppression. Oppression and injustice are consistently repudiated.

We need to examine scripture in the light of our vision of *shalom*, looking more deeply and exploring the cultural biases that have clouded our vision of wholeness; the vision that we were all made male and female, in God's image (*Genesis 1:27*). We note scriptural injunctions that relate to our treatment of women, children and the elderly. For instance:

- Wives and husbands are to live in a *mutually respectful* relationship. To justify the patriarchal family structure, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is often quoted: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour" (*Ephesians 5:22-23*). However, Paul began this verse with the injunction, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," (*Ephesians 5:21*), suggesting mutual submission in healthy, marital relationships. Paul also wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them" (*Colossians 3:19*); and "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." When scripture is used to justify women's submission to abusive men, it constitutes a serious distortion of the Word that counsels loving, mutual, relationships between women and men.

- Children are not regarded as lesser beings, but as persons with special qualities and gifts to offer the community. Mutuality in relationships between children and adults is suggested in some scriptural passages. While children are taught to honour their parents (*Deuteronomy 5:16*), fathers are told, "Do not provoke your children to anger" (*Ephesians 6:4*). Childlikeness is held up as an ideal in the Gospels as Jesus tells his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn

and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (*Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48*).

- The aged as well as the poor are to be protected from want and oppression (*Acts 6; 1 Timothy 5*). Poverty is a fact of life for many elderly persons, and it must be recognized that most battered women are poor, regardless of their class background. They cannot exercise control over family assets without further endangering their health and their lives. Finally they are driven to leave the violent relationship. Most women who leave find themselves suddenly and extremely disadvantaged economically. Women and the elderly account for many of the people living below the poverty line in Canada; and concern for their children increases their distress.

- In the ancient covenant community, respect for the young and the old rested not on their productivity or usefulness, but simply on their existence (*Leviticus 19:32; Numbers 8:23-26*). The elderly, like all people, were to be respected and honoured (*Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:32; Ephesians 6:4*) and regarded as a dependable source of wisdom and good judgment (*Leviticus 4:15; Deuteronomy 19:12; 21:2; Mark 8:31; Luke 2:25-38; 20:1; Acts 4:5,8,23*).

The pain victims of violence experience is eloquently expressed in our scriptures:

My heart is in anguish within me,
the terrors of death have fallen upon
me
Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.
And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest;
yea, I would wander afar,
I would lodge in the wilderness,
I would haste to find me a shelter
from the raging wind and tempest."

It is not an enemy who taunts me -
then I could bear it;
it is not an adversary who deals insolently
with me
then I could hide from him.
But it is you, my equal,
my companion, my familiar friend.
We used to hold sweet converse together
within God's house we walked in fellowship
Let death come upon them;
let them go down to Sheol alive;
let them go away in terror into their
graves.

My companion stretched forth his hand
against his friends;
he violated his covenant.
His speech was smoother than butter,
yet war was in his heart;
his words were softer than oil,
yet they were drawn swords.

(Psalms 55:5-8; 12-14; 20-21)

When we are most faithful to the message of Jesus, responding constructively to family violence, we connect with some great traditions of the indigenous people of Canada, eloquently expressed by Ray Senft, a native poet and painter:

Our Heritage

Honour the elderly.
In honouring them
you honour life and wisdom.
Honour women; in honouring women
you honour the gift of life and love.
Honour life in all its forms.
Your own will be sustained.
Be peaceful; through peace
you will find the Great Peace.

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Some Theological Issues

Some modern theologians have provided us with a valuable framework with which to approach the problem of family violence. They suggest that we must start with an individual's experience, and encourage reflection on that experience. This means that an abused or assaulted woman, child or elderly person is encouraged to acknowledge the experience and to speak up.

God's Word and Our Words

Yet our religious language is so suffused with patriarchal attitudes, we tend to stumble when we do speak. Our images and theological language prove inadequate. For instance, we use almost exclusively male images of God, principally God as Father, even though we know that some children's experience of "father" is of a man who assaults them or beats their mother.

The Anglican Church of Canada's paper *Violence Against Women* states the problem succinctly:

"Central to the Christian image of God is the understanding of God as the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The language of the Trinity, as the church has reinforced it, is essentially hierarchical, static, and discrete. 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Holy Ghost' may have originated as images of a living, personal God, but by usage and connotation, they now convey the opposite. In a patriarchal society, 'Father' has come to be associated with a role of authority, power, and control; 'Son' has become a term of gender (male offspring) rather than relationship (child of love); and 'Holy Ghost' comes from the vocabulary of another age, and has lost its root meaning. The result is an image of God that is static, detached from creation, and non-nurturing...

"If our images for God, such as 'Father-God' or 'Lord and King,' are exclusively male, the woman battered by her husband, or the child abused by a father or father-figure, may have

no means for perceiving God as loving and protective of the vulnerable."

The report goes on to point out that:

"A theology which emphasized Christ as Victor, at the expense of Christ as Victim, is in danger of becoming a teaching which reaches out to the victor rather than a victim in society."⁸

Part of our long-term theological task in confronting family violence is to re-image God for ourselves and our communities, retrieving from our past the loving, empowering images of God, and creating new language to express the liberating God of our own experience. This work is now being carried on by many scholars and theologians influenced by feminist thought, and it is recommended reading for any pastoral caregivers working with victims of family violence.**

The Good News of Peace

If our religious tradition and traditional language present difficulties for us in coming to terms (literally) with family violence, they also present us with messages of liberation.

Referring to the elderly, though it applies to one's relationship to children and women as well, Arthur H. Becker sums up the quality of wholeness as a concern for the dignity of life:

"The biblical and theological foundations for this concern are quite clear: all persons are created in the image of God, which is to say not only that they stand in special relationship to God, but that by creative acts and continued involvement in the creation of the world God is irrevocably committed to humanity. Any treatment of any human being that does not consider this foundation and ultimate destiny fails to respect the dignity of that person and is an affront to God, the Creator and Redeemer."

Becker continues to draw out the implications of our inherent dignity:

"The erosion of dignity results from the loss or even the usurping of a person's decision-making power. The retention of this power as long as it can be exercised is highly important to one's sense of personhood or autonomy. Personal autonomy *alone* is not the primary ethical value Christian pastoral care of elders would preserve; to assert this would be to undercut the importance of personal relationships. It is interrelated autonomy - autonomy within the matrix of responsible relationships to God, family and society - that we seek to preserve."⁹

A victim of violence has had his or her autonomy, and therefore dignity, seriously eroded. This is an affront to God and when scriptures are used to justify the situation then it is also an abuse of scripture. As Christian ministers, lay and ordered alike, our task is clearly to deepen our understanding of God's word to allow us to proclaim the message of *shalom*, a peace respectful of each person's dignity and autonomy. *Shalom*, while usually translated as "peace," literally means "wholeness, health." There is no place for violence of any kind when people are treated as whole persons.

Issues of Guilt, Repentance, Forgiveness and Reconciliation

For the abused woman, child or elderly person, guilt, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are complex and difficult issues. For pastoral care workers they are difficult issues to untangle.

Our society tends to burden women with the role of being the emotional care-takers within the family and to maintain the peace within the family at almost any cost. Since most of the victims of family violence are women, this expectation has serious implications. It is important to understand that most victims of family violence habitually understate the extent of the violence, and seek reconciliation prematurely

without changing the nature of the abusive relationship. They do this *because they blame themselves for the violence*. This pattern enhances the likelihood that the violence will not end, but will probably escalate. At the same time the misplaced feeling of personal guilt that the victim experiences is reinforced within the Christian community.

It is important to be absolutely clear on the point that the perpetrator of any act of family violence has sinned against the victim and against God. This sin is usually a criminal offence as well. No understanding of marriage or family can ever justify it. The perpetrator of an assault is guilty, no matter what contributing factors might be raised as excuses for violence.

Forgiveness is possible in the aftermath of physical abuse only if the person who has been subjected to it has been assured of personal safety, and is no longer subjected to verbal or psychological abuse. Even after all abuse has ceased, forgiveness is a very long process. A person recovering from abuse should not be burdened with the unrealistic expectations of a pastoral worker who wants the person to "forgive and forget." Not only the abused person's rights but their very being has been violated and they need an opportunity to vent anger and rage. They might also need support in seeking justice through the courts, or through less formal channels to assure support, compensation and a just property settlement.

Forgiving oneself can be the hardest task for a victim whose self-image has been shattered, either by a single assault or by chronic abuse. It may take a lifetime to accomplish, particularly for children who have been sexually abused. It is a process that cannot be hurried.

Real forgiveness comes at the final stage of a long process through which victims regain control of their lives. They no longer let the experience of violence dominate their lives, and are ready to move on. In effect, forgiveness occurs

when the victim is no longer a victim, but is free and autonomous, experiencing full dignity as a person.

Reconciliation between the victim and the perpetrator is often impossible and is undesirable if it puts the victim at risk again. To be reconciled with God, with the church, and with oneself might be a stronger possibility.

For the perpetrator of violence a *true* confession is an important first step. We have to be quite clear about what constitutes a true confession. True repentance means turning from that sin and not repeating it. Asking for cheap forgiveness is an established pattern in most cases of wife assault, part of the cycle of violence that is identified by people who counsel abusers and the victims. The man will often say he's sorry after an attack and his apologies might be quite genuine, BUT HIS APOLOGY IN NO WAY GUARANTEES THAT THE ABUSE WON'T RECUR. When we, as ministers or counsellors, accept such a confession as genuine repentance before the root causes of the man's violence are explored, and before the woman's safety is guaranteed, then we become a part of the problem rather than a help to the family. The victim may no longer trust our role as counsellor/confidant.

The pattern of violence against children is rather different, particularly with sexual abuse. An advocate for sexually abused children, after years of experience, stated quite bluntly, "I've never met a man who has admitted his crime." Some abusers may admit their action, but deny that the child was harmed by the abuse. While it is important to help the offender acknowledge his or her wrong-doing, the highest priority must always be the safety and well-being of the child above the interests of the perpetrator of abuse.

So little research has been done on elder abuse that it is difficult to identify patterns, except to note that again, issues of forgiveness and reconciliation are complex when they involve inti-

mate relationships, commonly those of mother and child in the case of the abused elderly person.

This is not to say that forgiveness and reconciliation are impossible, but we must ourselves confess that, as a church, our bias has been first to cover up family violence and secondly, to opt for quick forgiveness and reconciliation even when it has endangered the health and safety of the victims. This is a deeply rooted bias among Christians, based on the high value we place on the family and reinforced by a shallow understanding of family violence. We must strive for a deeper understanding of the process and reality of forgiveness and reconciliation that is informed by the victims' experiences of family violence.

Repentance and reconciliation are a collective, as well as a personal need. We've all been guilty of participating in the cover-up when we've ignored the plight of the victims of family violence and perpetuated the prison of silence that the victims live within. We have failed to challenge a social order of inequalities between men, women, children and the elderly, that is rife with violence and abuse. The limited resources provided to victims of family violence, the overcrowding in women's shelters and the lack of services in rural areas for victims of family violence, indicate our collective guilt and our need for repentance and reconciliation.

Forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation must also be viewed in the context of the entire community. As David Augsburger summarizes:

"Forgiveness is a brother-brother, sister-sister process, a two-way mutual interaction of resolving differences and re-creating relationships between persons of equal worth...

"Repentance is owning what was in full acknowledgment of the past and it is choosing what will be in open responsibility for one's behavior in the future... In repentance past injuries are fully recognized, future intentions

are truly genuine, and right relations are now being expressed and experienced with each other."¹⁰

Marriage as Covenant

Our understanding of Christian marriage is that it is a covenant relationship, not a mere contractual arrangement between consenting adults. Christian teaching on the marriage relationship has relied heavily on Paul's writings, (*Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Corinthians 7; Colossians 3:18-4:1*) and on the sayings of Jesus prohibiting divorce (*Matthew 4:31-32, 19:7-12; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11-12*). The understanding of marriage as a covenant may strengthen and enrich family life, but it poses some dangers if we assume that the exchange of marriage vows binds women, children and elderly to the very people who abuse them.

We need to examine carefully what constitutes a covenantal relationship. As Gail Golding points out:

"The covenant of Christian marriage is a lifelong, sacred commitment made between two persons and witnessed by other persons and by God. A covenant between marriage partners has the following elements: (1) It is made in full knowledge of the relationship. (2) It involves a *mutual* giving of self to the other. (3) It is assumed to be lasting. (4) It values mutuality, respect, and equality between persons...

"In violent homes, it is not divorce that is breaking up families. Violence and abuse are breaking up families. Divorce is often the painful, public acknowledgment of an already accomplished fact. While divorce is never easy, it is, in the case of wife assault, the lesser evil. In many cases divorce may be a necessary intervention to generate healing and new life from a devastating and life-threatening situation."¹¹

The Meaning of Suffering

The cross is a central and powerful image for Christians, symbolizing the redemptive power of suffering. This symbol is often distorted to justify violence, whereby abuse is interpreted as the cross that the victim must bear. Jesus' suffering unto death is presented to abused women, children and elderly people as a model for their response to the violence they suffer. The message is given, 'You must be willing to suffer as Christ suffered.' The theme of the suffering servant contained in the Book of Isaiah is similarly stressed by such apologists for violence.

What this theological justification for suffering seems to overlook is the structures of power that create and legitimate the suffering. God did not create these structures and the victim does not choose the path of suffering. It also overlooks the resurrection. Jesus' suffering and death would have been one more murder among millions of murders perpetrated in human history, but it has particular meaning in the light of Easter, Christ's liberation from suffering and death. Jesus' solidarity with the suffering victims of violence may be an acute consolation for a victim, but it is in reality only the precursor to an ultimate liberation from suffering. Christian faith is an ongoing celebration of Easter. The message of Good Friday without Easter would be despair, not redemption.¹²

Some victims of abuse do not identify their suffering with Jesus', but rather see it as God's punishment for their past wrong-doings. They see themselves, rather than the perpetrator of the violence, as the wrong-doer. There are powerful psychological forces at work in victim-blaming, and this is often reinforced by the victim's family, minister, and friends. Of course the perpetrator is eager to justify his behaviour by placing the blame on the victim. If victims continue to blame themselves for their suffering, then the pattern of violence will almost certainly continue and probably escalate. And if family, community and pastoral counsellors place any

responsibility for the violence on the victims they become co-conspirators in perpetuating the violence.

Yet, even when the violence ends, suffering remains a poignant experience for any victim, and the meaning of suffering a crucial issue. This is particularly evident in cases of child abuse and sexual abuse, where survivors continue to experience psychological suffering throughout their adult lives. We are all too quick to supply pat answers as a way of avoiding our own pain and sorrow that violence has occurred and continues to occur. There are no pat answers. We need to learn to listen to the victims of violence in our communities, whose quest for justice can inform our spirituality and theology.

The Challenge to the Church's Mission

The challenge to put an end to the violence within our own families and community is a vital challenge to the church's mission. Violence within a Christian family can precipitate a personal crisis, an economic crisis, and almost always a crisis of faith. As leaders in the Christian community we must be prepared to speak out against this violence, to address the needs of the victims, and to help the perpetrators of violence acknowledge their sins. A recent survey conducted by the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence indicated that in rural areas a member of the clergy would be one of the first persons an abused woman might turn to for help. Ministers, priests and lay leaders need to be prepared to understand her courageous step toward ending the abuse; and be prepared to offer her concrete support.

When violence is disclosed, the highest priority must be the SAFETY of the victim. Once this is ensured, then a plan to end the violence must be put into place. This will almost always require the assistance of trained professionals and outside agencies. We may be in a position to facilitate this process. We may also be of particular service in addressing some of the spiritual

issues raised by the victim or perpetrator. We can be constructive listeners. The need for mourning a broken relationship can be affirmed, and both the victim and the perpetrator may need support during this period.

But our first responsibility is TO END THE VIOLENCE within our communities. To do so we have to acknowledge it, be prepared to respond appropriately to disclosures of violence, and be willing to work toward prevention of violence.

"I had arrived in a rural charge fresh out of divinity school. After I'd been there a while I felt the need to address the issue of wife assault when I preached. I suppose because I'd raised the issue, several women in the congregation came forward and disclosed that they were being abused by their husbands. They needed to talk to another woman about the abuse they suffered, but I didn't know what to do. We are very isolated here. There are few services. All I felt I could do was to listen. What could I offer these women?"

What this minister has already offered members of her congregation is an opportunity to break the silence. In raising the issue in the context of preaching God's word, she has accomplished a great deal. She has overcome a strong cultural and theological bias that tends to ignore the reality of violence against women, particularly violence against wives. She has re-examined scripture and discovered the great themes of peace and justice that challenge us to confront family violence.

Through her action in breaking the silence that suppresses our awareness of family violence, this minister demonstrated great personal courage. Being a woman in a male-dominated profession, in a male-dominated church, in a male-dominated society she undoubtedly has confronted oppressive social structures in her personal and professional life. She probably has the emotional scars to prove it. So in order to talk freely about wife abuse she needed to examine

her own experiences of abuse, her fears, her defensiveness, her feelings of shame and vulnerability and her own responsibilities. What has hurt and what has healed her?

A minister who is male needs to go through a parallel process in order to address issues of family violence. If he was abused as a child, or witnessed the abuse of his mother or grandmother, the process might be similar to his female colleague's. He also needs to examine what it means to him and what it feels like to be a man in a male-dominated society. How has he used his power and privilege? How has he abused it? Does he continue to abuse it?

Our race and class, as well as our gender, influence the way we experience family violence. Wife assault, child abuse and elder abuse cut across class lines and occur in all ethnic and racial groups in Canada. Each woman, whether white urban middle-class, a new immigrant, a native woman or a rural woman will face different issues and have different resources available to her if she is assaulted, and this influences the way she responds to the issue. Similarly, a black male minister might have a different perspective on family violence than either his female or white male colleague. We all have to come to terms with our experience of power and privilege, or our lack of it, to be effective in our ministries to victims of family violence.

This minister's experience of breaking the silence about wife assault, only to feel powerless to help women who disclosed their own experiences, highlights the need for ministers to be prepared to respond appropriately, despite the scant resources available to victims of abuse in Canada. Breaking the silence challenges the church to be faithful to its ministry of peace in concrete, practical ways. In the following pages this manual provides guidelines for some situations of disclosure.

But we face yet a larger challenge. The minister's story highlights the prophetic role of

the church. When members of our community speak up for themselves against violence, then our prophetic role as Christians entails calling our whole society to account so that it provides adequate protection for all its members. Services such as shelters, crisis lines, personal counselling, legal and financial aid to victims of violence, and counselling for abusers must be made available in rural areas as well as urban centres. Ultimately our prophetic role involves us in the process of restructuring our society such that abuse of women, children and the elderly no longer occurs.

Living Out the Special Vision of the Church

The churches can do a great deal to support and enhance family life. In doing so we might help prevent abuse from occurring or recurring. We are graced with a rich tradition of covenantal love, beginning with the covenant between God and the people of God, that supports life and endures. Our scriptures ring out a call to liberation for peoples who have been oppressed, and bid us always to hear the oppressed and to be informed by their experience.

Furthermore, our Christian vision places us in a rather unique position within the larger society. Christians believe that growth and hope for new life carry throughout our entire life. Contrast this vision with that of our youth-centred society. The popular media depict youthfulness as an absolute value, a quality to be sought after, imitated and preserved. The humility of the child and the wisdom gained by years are discounted. Aging is a process to be feared instead of revered. As we grow old we fear we will be less valued, and indeed we probably will be unless our society recaptures the values of wisdom and experience.

The larger society places very high value on productivity, seen primarily in a material sense. Thus, those who are not productive may be less valued. Children, the elderly and homemakers

whose contributions cannot necessarily be measured by the standard of material productivity, are discounted.

Christians are called to value all contributions and value human life in all its stages. Each person is known as a creation of God, capable of growing toward perfection individually and in our collectivity. We feel empowered by God to become ever more God-like through Christ.

The high value we place on the individual's integrity also suggests a particular bias toward victims of abuse. It is not enough for us to try to offer protection for the victim and solace for survivors; no one is simply a victim. We must strive to enhance every person's sense of themselves as a precious, unique and powerful individual. The gift of Christ's message, our vision, compels us to confront family violence and the false values that contribute to the problem. Through Christ empowerment, not mere survival, is our goal.

* All scripture quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

** An annotated bibliography, including some feminist theologians working in the area of family violence, is included in the Resource Section of this manual.

Footnotes

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

"To love, honour and cherish from this day forward, as long as we both shall live." We grow up aware that adults around us may have made such a promise, we ourselves may have made this promise to someone. It is a promise full of hope, love and happiness and we want to believe in it. A woman who is abused by her spouse wants to believe in that promise. Probably the man, although he abuses his wife, wants to believe in it.

The Scope of the Problem of Wife Assault

In 1980 when it was reported in the House of Commons in Canada that a fact-finding study showed that one in ten Canadian women were physically abused by their partner, members of the house laughed.¹ This shameful display indicates our general reluctance to accept the facts and acknowledge the scope of the problem of wife assault. Now it is suspected that one in ten is perhaps a conservative estimate of the number of women who are abused by the men with whom they have an intimate relationship, and that few abused women report the problem to the police. A study conducted in London, Ontario indicates that, on the average, thirty-five incidents of assault will have occurred before the woman comes forward to report the abuse.²

We also know that 40 per cent of wife assaults begin during the wife's first pregnancy, and that the abuse usually escalates unless effective action is taken to end the violence.³ Assaults may result in bruises, fractured bones, internal injuries, burns, torn ligaments and dislocated joints. In 1982, 52 per cent of all female homicide victims in Canada were killed by a member of their family.⁴ Studies indicate that abused women are also far more likely to attempt taking their own life.⁵

A recent study estimated that one in every eight

wives may have been raped by their husbands, and that these women may suffer from severe non-sexual violence as well.⁶

There may be violence even where no visible physical injuries are sustained. Where there has been emotional abuse or spiritual abuse, the woman may be left feeling incapacitated, betrayed, frightened, crazy, perhaps unclear about what went wrong in her relationship, perhaps blaming herself.

People always ask, "What about men who are battered?" particularly by emotional or verbal abuse, or are murdered by their partners. Emotional and verbal abuse of men does occur, but it usually doesn't accompany the same threat of physical violence and the power dynamic is distinctly different. Abuse of men is not usually reinforced by the social, religious and economic factors that are operative in women's experience of violence. Women do sometimes kill their male partners, but this usually happens as a final resort after months or years of being violated by the man.

Definitions

A woman who has suffered abuse from her partner may be afraid or ashamed to talk about it. She may not even want to think about it. There-

fore, it is important that we take any report of abuse seriously and that we respond to a report calmly and non-judgmentally, encouraging the woman to speak up about abuse so that she can get help.

Generally, psychological abuse is not defined as criminal, although a woman reporting psychological abuse may also be experiencing assaults.

Psychological abuse can include:

- ignoring/belittling feelings
- ridiculing/insulting women as a group
- withholding approval, appreciation, or affection as punishment
- insulting her family/friends or driving them away
- humiliating her in public/private
- controlling the money
- refusing to share money
- taking car/keys away
- threatening the children
- manipulating with lies
- blaming her for his abusiveness
- minimizing his abusiveness
- refusing to help her when she is ill, injured or pregnant
- hurting or killing a family pet
- threatening murder or suicide.

Emotional abuse may be explicitly sexual, and include:

- anti-women jokes/demeaning remarks
- assuming/accusing her of having sex with others
- criticizing her sexually
- withholding affection
- forcing her to view pornography
- forcing her to model for pornographic photos, videos, etc.

All forms of physical abuse are criminal and are covered under assault legislation in Canada.

Physical abuse can include:

- pushing and shoving
- biting
- choking
- kicking
- slapping, hitting and punching
- restraining
- throwing objects
- forcing her to be a passenger when he is driving wrecklessly. (This, and restraining behaviour, might be considered kidnapping.)
- pulling hair
- threatening with a weapon
- stabbing
- burning.⁷

In Canada any forced sexual act between married people is considered sexual assault and is a crime. It may include:

- forcing her to have sex
- forcing particular unwanted sex acts forcing
- sex after battering
- forcing sex with animals.

The Cycle of Violence

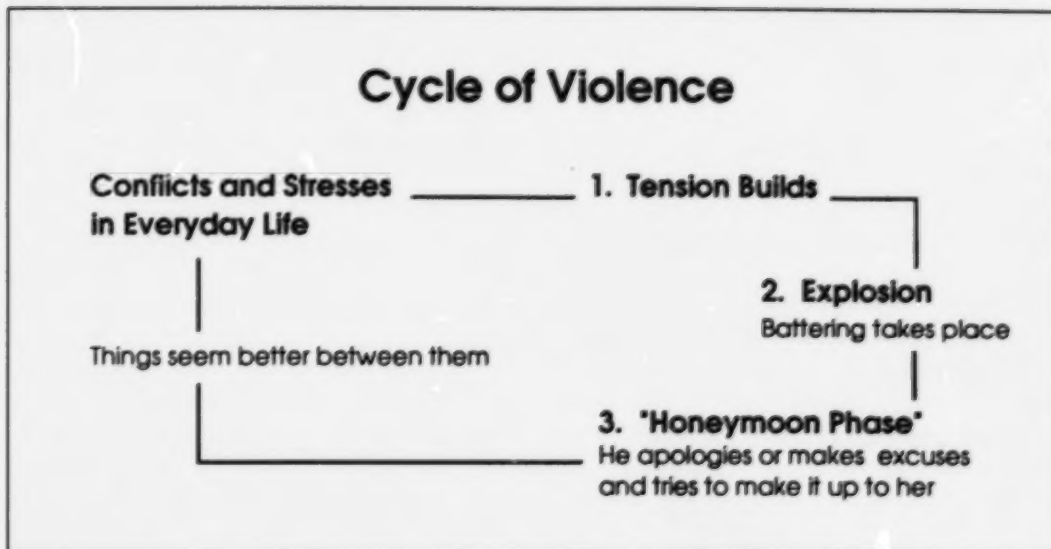
For a woman subjected to violence at the hands of someone with whom she has an intimate relationship, the assaults are not random occurrences. There is a pattern of assault that has been termed "the cycle of violence." The cycle is repeated, the degree of violence escalating, while the duration of the cycle tends to become shorter. When violent attacks begin occurring more and more frequently the woman will likely feel as if she's entered a vortex, a nightmare.

In the first phase of the cycle tension mounts over a period of time, and may be marked by mounting psychological abuse or minor incidents of assault, such as pushing and shoving. In the beginning the woman may not understand what is happening to her, but after she has been through it time and time again she may sense when an attack is imminent. Often, in this phase,

she will do whatever she can to ease the tension, attempting to placate her partner to avoid an explosion, with little or no success.

Then there is an explosion. Alcohol abuse is sometimes associated with an attack, but the fact that the man has been drinking only serves as an excuse. Impaired though he may be, he did not

After a violent episode there is usually a period of remorse, a calm. The woman often tries to forgive and forget. She may feel frightened, hurt and humiliated, and her partner may attempt to comfort her. The man often promises at this time that it will never happen again. Counsellors who work with abusers claim that virtually all men who abuse their wives feel some remorse after an incident.



choose to attack anyone at the bar, nor on the street. He came home and attacked his wife. It is part of his pattern of violence, and the alcohol abuse is a separate problem. Or perhaps there was an argument that sparked the attack and serves as some justification. At this point in the cycle any excuse might do. But violence does not always erupt in the context of an argument; women report having been awakened in their beds to be beaten.

Sometimes a woman seeks help right at or shortly after the "explosion" stage of the cycle. She may describe in detail what happened, only to deny the seriousness of what happened, even turn against the helping person, as she enters a new phase in the cycle, the phase commonly referred to as "the honeymoon" period.

Someone who has been called upon to help during the explosion may themselves feel distressed, angry and betrayed if the victim of the assault now appears to "join forces" with her partner over and against the helper. After being called on as a friend, one may suddenly be treated like an enemy. It helps to recognize that this third stage in the cycle of violence can be emotionally intense for the victim, and to recognize how much the abused woman wants things to work out for herself and her partner.

Persons who counsel abused women report that it is in this third phase that marital rape often occurs. While more violent rape might occur during an explosion, in this latter phase a different dynamic is operative. The man may now be trying to placate his partner and may show some

tenderness toward her. Then he makes a sexual advance. If she is frightened her resistance may be tentative and if she does refuse to engage in sex, he may feel confused or angry and force an unwanted sexual act upon her.

While the abuser's remorse may be quite real after an attack, **IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT HE WILL NOT ASSAULT HER AGAIN.** Unless effective action is taken to break the cycle there will be a recurrence of the abuse, and it usually gets worse.

What Prevents Women From Leaving?

Women stay in abusive relationships for any number of reasons. Of particular concern to the church is that many women feel it is their Christian duty to keep their marriage together at almost any cost. A woman who has reported abuse to a pastor, a friend, her mother, or a member of her congregation whom she trusts, has sometimes been told to return to her husband and try again, particularly if he has shown remorse. As stated above, almost all abusers do feel some remorse.

Economic factors figure largely in many women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships, but there are social factors outside the church as well as within it that encourage women to stay in abusive relationships. The traditional female role places responsibility on the woman to keep her family emotionally and physically healthy and intact. Most women tend to put the needs of the family before their own needs.

Further immobilizing the abused women is a strong tendency in our society to blame the victim for her misfortune. "Why did you marry him if he's such a rat?" or "What did you do that made him so angry?" are questions often posed to abused women. The abuser often seems to be a very nice man outside the relationship. Perhaps he is a pillar in the community, an elder in the church. He is probably not violent outside the home so we may point our finger at the

abused woman as the one to blame, and she may also blame herself.

Fear is a major factor keeping women in abusive relationships. Living in constant fear paralyzes a person so that making any decision is very difficult, if not impossible. There is the fear that if she does anything, then the violence could get worse. The abuser may have threatened her implicitly or explicitly - "You leave; I'll kill you." She believes what he says. Indeed he could kill her. As stated previously, the majority of female homicides in Canada occur within the family context, which is why effective action must be taken when such a threat is made.

The abused woman will have real economic concerns if she leaves an abusive relationship. She may be economically dependent on the abusing mate, and not know where to turn for financial aid or job counselling. Her abuser may make sure she doesn't have even enough money for transportation, or in a rural area may deny her access to a vehicle. She may also have immigration problems and be concerned that her status in Canada is dependent upon her relationship with her spouse.

If there are children there is the added concern for their well-being. She may not want the children estranged from their father, or she may be concerned that she would not be given custody or access rights to her children. Presently in Canada custody is determined according to what the judge considers to be in the child's best interest. It is no longer true that a woman jeopardizes her rights as the custodial parent if she leaves the house in order to protect herself from further abuse. However, custody is a complex issue. An abused woman's concerns about her children's well-being are very real and usually well founded. We must be prepared to address these concerns in order to assist her.

Another difficulty for a woman in an abusive relationship arises from her own reluctance to move out of that relationship. She might genu-

inely still love the man, wanting only for the violence to stop, not to end the relationship. She may be willing to do anything other than leave in order to end the violence, although it is not in her power to end it. The tendency for women to remain in abusive relationships has been labelled "The Battered Wife Syndrome" by some psychologists, wherein the woman can see no alternatives to her present situation; she blames herself or she firmly believes that if she just does something better - shows more patience, is a better housekeeper, keeps the children quiet - then the violence will end. Her spouse said it won't happen again and she wants to believe him.

"Think about it," a woman's shelter worker explains. "She's just been beaten. She's humiliated, she hurts, she doesn't feel like there's anyone who will help her or even listen to her. And then the man who beats her says he's sorry, says it won't happen again. He picks her up off the floor, wipes her face, cuddles her, apologizing, maybe crying all the while. She's hooked again."

Making changes to end the violence is a long process for most abused women, and a woman who discloses the violence may be at any stage in that process. If she is resolved to make changes, a pastoral care worker can provide some of the support necessary for her to do it. But a woman who is not yet resolved to make the changes may choose to stay in a violent situation.

If a woman returns to the abuser she still needs support even though the pastoral care worker might not agree with her decision. That support may entail the expression of concern for her safety, helping her develop a safety plan and a plan to escape if she needs to get out again fast. A pastoral care worker can help her:

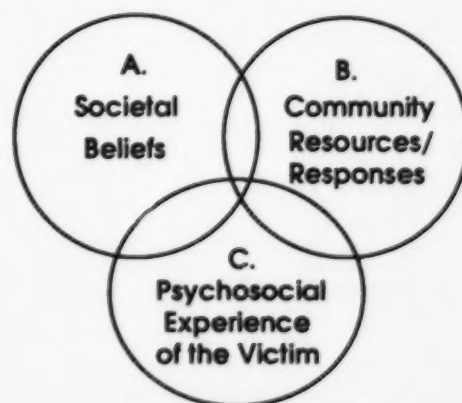
- Recognize the cycle of violence, and make a plan for her protection;
- Develop a plan of escape (to a trustworthy neighbour's house? If there is nowhere to run

she might be able to identify a relatively safe spot in her own house, but this is risky. It is wiser to leave the house.)

- Develop her own friends and support systems;
- Plan for the future (e.g. returning to school or getting a job);
- Open her own bank account that can be kept hidden (This can be difficult to keep confidential, particularly in rural areas, but a counsellor may be able to assist her in doing so, perhaps providing transportation to a bank in another town.);
- Find a safe place to keep passports and important papers to which she could get easy access.

A pastoral care worker may be able to help her evaluate the various factors that are leading her to make this particular decision. But it is important that he or she respects her autonomy, not

The counsellor's task is to evaluate with the woman those factors that are most pressing in her not changing her situation.



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necessarily agreeing with the decision, but affirming that it is her right to decide.

Why Men Abuse Women

by David Currie ⁸

Factors which create and maintain the problem of violence against women permeate all areas of our society. By being aware of, and addressing these factors in our efforts at intervention, we can design programs that will work toward structural changes to help bring about the cessation of violence against women. In addition to the social context within which violence occurs, there are a number of psychological characteristics concerning the abuser which must also be considered.

The Psychological Profile of the Abuser

The Desire to Control

Abusive husbands exhibit a strong desire to control their partner's behaviour, including her thoughts and feelings. Their control is established by means of inducing fear in the woman by one or more abusive forms of behaving (e.g., physical, psychological, verbal, property damage). This inducement of fear may completely immobilize the woman, preventing her from taking any action on her own behalf. At any point in time where he feels he is losing control over her, he may employ a fear-inducing technique with the explicit purpose of re-establishing his control.

The abusive husband often appears to be highly sensitive and vulnerable to separations from his partner. In actual fact, what he is sensitive to is losing control over her. If the woman leaves, or threatens to leave, the relationship he will provide all sorts of promises about stopping his abusive behaviour and seeking treatment if she will agree to reconcile. Such fears of losing control over her are also seen in his attempts to restrict her affiliations outside the home, particularly those with other men.

In the society in which he lives, the man has much support for controlling his wife. Historically, such support has even been present under legal sanction, as in 'The Rule of Thumb'.⁹ The rule specified that a man could strike his wife with a stick, provided that the stick was no wider than the width of his thumb. This was designed to help husbands, who were heads of households, keep the woman and children in line. Such a message may still echo today from the man's friends and family members. His image of himself as a man, and as a husband, may result in his perceived right to control his wife.

The fear of loss of control reaches the ultimate when a man decides to murder his partner and then to take his own life. Such an action on his part shows the final desperate measures to which the man may resort in order to avoid relinquishing control over her.

Externalization of Responsibility for Behaviour

This is one of the most frequently observed characteristics of the abusive husband. It describes how he will hold someone else (usually his partner) responsible for his abuse. He will often make up excuses of one sort or another or claim that he was "provoked" into behaving as he did. He will also tend to minimize or deny his abusive behaviour and any resulting injuries. His account of the details of the incident of abuse will usually differ significantly from that of his wife.

An abusive husband is often motivated to seek treatment by external factors such as separation, or threat of separation, initiated by his partner, charges by the police, the advice of defense lawyers, or a court or probation order. The primary reason for seeking treatment is a response to an actual, or threatened, separation from his wife. Under such circumstances the man will usually remain involved in treatment as long as the hope of reconciliation is manifest. The

man may well attend a number of sessions with the sole purpose of appeasing his wife so that she will not leave him. Such an arrangement will have little impact on his violent behaviour.

Further, a man may attempt to coerce his partner to return because he is seeking counselling. Or he may agree to seek counselling only if she agrees to return home at once. Such situations only further indicate his need for treatment, as his coercive behaviour towards her continues. In cases where a man is primarily motivated simply to get his wife back, he may well drop out of treatment after she returns home.

Despite this, a few men have initiated treatment themselves, either because they have finally come to realize that it is not their partner's problem, or because they have found themselves repeating their violent behaviour in a subsequent relationship, realizing when the relationship ended that it was not really a new partner they needed.

Rigid Thinking

Rigid thinking often serves as a defense mechanism or as a source of security for the psychologically vulnerable man. Rigid thinking embraces a clearly defined set of expectations and behaviour patterns which are frequently based on traditional sexual stereotypes - the woman as housekeeper and child raiser, the man as income earner and major decision maker. The husband may view any change in this pattern as a threat and may react violently.

Low Self-Esteem

Although abusive husbands may appear to be confident and angry individuals who blame their partners for their violent behaviour, in fact they suffer from low self-esteem. The continuation of violent episodes serves to increase the negative self-image. Abusive husbands rarely feel good about their

abusive behaviour, even though they may claim to have many reasons to justify it. An abusive husband usually claims to feel guilt and remorse after a violent incident; however, such feelings are usually not related to what he has inflicted upon his partner. He is upset at losing control of her and of himself and seeks to re-establish this sense of control. His attempts to make up and his promises not to repeat the violence are sometimes indications of such attempts. Any unsuccessful attempts to re-establish his sense of control by himself result in increased negative feelings about himself and, possibly, increased violence. His feelings about himself may be further eroded if after receiving poor professional intervention, he is still unable to stop behaving violently. This underlines the importance of having an informed professional community.

In a study of the self-esteem of abusive husbands, Goldstein and Rosenbaum reported the "Wife abuse is associated with deficiencies in the self-esteem of the abusive husband."¹⁰ They add "Regardless of whether the abuse was a cause or effect of low self-esteem, once that esteem is damaged it may become an etiological factor in future abuse incidents. Dealing with the self-esteem of the abusive husband may, therefore, help to prevent future violence."¹¹

Emotional Isolation

An abusive husband may well work full time, have a number of business and personal acquaintances, and yet be quite emotionally isolated from the world around him. Social norms do not encourage men to examine or talk about their emotional lives. Many men are not even particularly aware of their own feelings, let alone those of others. They are encouraged to relate to other in ways that, all too often, exclude warm, personal, and intimate exchanges. Conversation between men usually concerns external as-

pects of their lives, rather than internal experiences or emotions. When a man's sense of identity is based on this kind of superficial interaction, his sense of isolation and loneliness may be substantial.

Symptoms of Abuse

Since our social and religious biases, as well as the psychological experience of both the abuser and the victim of abuse, conspire to conceal abuse, we need to be extremely attentive to the symptoms of the violence. Apart from a direct disclosure of abuse, either by the victim, the assailant, or by a child in the home, violence may come to the attention of a pastor or member of the congregation almost as if it were in code. The victim may say, "Well, you know Alex. He has a terrible temper and the other night he really blew," or "What would you do if you suspected a friend of yours was getting hit by her husband?" It is important that we hear and respond to these messages since, for the victim, it requires great courage to speak. Remember that both the perpetrator and the victim usually trivialize the violence in their home. Take any message seriously.

There are many symptoms of abuse to which pastors or members of a congregation should be attentive. The abused wife may exhibit one or several of the following signs:

- Patterns of absenteeism, an interruption of regular attendance at Sunday services, choir practice, women's group meetings, or other regular church activities;
- Change in patterns, not sitting in one's regular place in church, avoiding friends, not staying for coffee after worship, etc.;
- Sudden changes in appearance; a radical change in clothing, either well-kept to slo-

only, or conservative to seductive, no make-up to a lot of make-up;

- Refusing pastoral visits at home;
- Break in regular contact. The man speaks for her on the phone, at church, etc.
- Unusual response to a request to participate in or assist with functions or activities. This may be due to limited or no access to transportation, no access to the necessary money, the denial of dignity, or the need for medical and dental services;
- Unusual appearances at the church, showing up at unusual times. For some battered women church is the one place they are allowed to go;
- Physical symptoms that may include new glasses, dental work due to broken teeth, a hair style covering bruises, obvious bruises and injuries such as burns, broken bones, unusual explanation for changes in appearance and/or injuries.¹²

Signals from Children Indicating Wife Abuse

A child in the home might also alert a pastoral care worker that wife abuse is occurring. The child might exhibit the same signs as his or her mother. Church attendance might drop off or they may become very involved in church activities as a place of escape from their violent home. When children are seriously hurting one another we may suspect that they have learned this violent behaviour at home. Witnessing their mother being assaulted can be devastating to the child, as well as to the mother. It is important to be attentive to changes in a child's behaviour as possible indications of violence in the home.

The following reactions have been observed in children and are separated into groups according to their age and stage of development. Any child could have some of these symptoms, but children from violent homes are more vulnerable to excessive symptoms of stress.

Preschoolers (birth to 5 years)

- physical complaints, such as stomach-aches, headaches
- sleep disturbances, such as insomnia, heightened fear of the dark, resistance to bedtime
- bed-wetting
- excessive separation anxieties
- whining, clinging, anxiety
- failure to thrive

School-age children (6 to 12 years)

School-age children may:

- become seductive or manipulative as a way of reducing tension in the home
- hang around their house a lot believing their presence will control the violence and will protect their mother — or they may do the exact opposite, avoiding their home as much as possible believing their absence will improve their parent's relationship
- fear being abandoned
- fear being killed or fear themselves killing someone else
- fear their own anger and others' anger
- exhibit eating disturbances, such as overeating, undereating or hoarding food
- become insecure and distrustful of their environment, especially if there are frequent unpredictable parental separations that they are not informed about

The effects of sex-role socialization can be seen as school-age children tend to separate their behaviours along sex lines.

Girls

- continuation of somatic complaints
- withdrawn, passive, compliant, clinging behaviour
- approval-seeking behaviour
- low frustration tolerance or infinite
- acting as "mother's little helper"

Some children experience one extreme...

- impaired concentration
- difficult with school work

- poor attendance patterns in school
- clumsy, accident-prone behaviour
- fear of attending school
- being labelled a "slow learner"

Adolescence (13 + years)

All teenagers are vulnerable to escapist, self-destructive behaviour. Adolescence is a particularly stressful stage and becomes even more acute for those teenagers from a violent home. The following examples illustrate the most extreme of these behaviours:

- escape into drug or alcohol abuse
- running away from home
- escape into pregnancy and early marriage
- suicidal thoughts and actions
- homicidal thoughts and actions
- criminal activities, such as drug-dealing, theft.

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Boys

- aggressive, acting out behaviour
- temper tantrums
- fights with siblings and classmates
- low frustration tolerance
- bullying

...while others will experience the exact opposite.

- excellent academic work
- perfectionist standards (harboring a tremendous fear of failure)
- overly responsible, especially the oldest child

Pastoral Interventions

An ordered minister, a Sunday school teacher or a lay person in the church may be the first person an abused woman can turn to, although rarely will a woman appear in a minister's office and openly admit the violence, asking for specific advice. More likely, she will make veiled comments to her minister or another member of the congregation about problems at home. She may say that her child's behaviour is worrying her or she may need to be given an opener. Publicly raising the issue of wife assault, either from the pulpit or in Bible study or prayer groups, may provide the opportunity for an abused woman or her child to take the first step toward ending the violence, admitting that violence has occurred and asking for help. But when the issue is raised publicly, ministers and pastoral care workers first need to be prepared to work effectively with women and children who come forward and disclose abuse.

Many people who work with abused women suggest that a victim of wife abuse needs another woman's help. She needs a role model and the understanding of another woman who will not accept abuse as her due; a woman who will help her develop a concept of herself as a free, self-reliant and dignified person. This need for modelling may pose a problem in congregations with male staff and clergy, and it suggests the need for new models of ministry in our churches. Identifying women in the congregation who are willing and able to do pastoral counselling with abused women, particularly women who have experienced abuse themselves and have ended it, is an option worth examining in every congregation. Training and support for these women would, of course, be necessary. Also, male clergy, when sensitized to the issue of abuse, can provide women and men with positive male role models.

Pastoral care workers particularly need to be prepared to address the spiritual crisis that an abused woman is experiencing. A woman who has been abused may have searching questions

about God who has created a world in which such violence occurs. Questions of self-worth, the meaning of suffering, sin and forgiveness, despair, and moral dilemmas are pressing issues for a victim of violence. She needs someone prepared to listen, someone who can affirm her personal worth and the fact that her first moral and religious responsibility is to secure her own safety.

Responding to Disclosures of Abuse

As we've noted earlier, a victim of abuse will not often disclose the abuse directly. She is isolated and has probably hidden signs of abuse from outsiders for some time. She has great difficulty coming right out and saying, "My husband beat me up." But she might allude to marriage problems, her own depression, her husband's "bad temper," troubles with the children.

We need to hear the coded messages she sends us and ask the question, is she being abused? You may ask, "How do you and your partner/husband fight?" "What does he do?" "Does he hit you?" "Are you in danger?" Such direct questions assure the abused woman that you are willing to hear her story, and they give her an opening.

If she responds affirmatively to direct questions, then the pastoral worker needs to stay calm, listen attentively and *believe the woman*. The abused woman usually minimizes the extent of the violence. Any expression of shock on the part of the listener, or any suggestion that she is exaggerating the problem, is inappropriate and serves to reinforce her isolation.

We need to listen to her story and affirm her feelings. We must refrain from rushing ahead to recommend solutions. Joy Bussert reminds us that, "The only expert on this issue is the battered woman herself. Do not presume to know what is best for her. It is best to let *her* teach *you* about the experience of being battered":

"Clergy and lay ministers must be not only

approachable, but shockproof. Any reaction of shock or horror in response to a woman's story will reinforce her sense of shame and embarrassment. It is, therefore, important to affirm, without judgment, whatever she says, whatever she feels - be it fear, sadness, worthlessness, and so on. She may not yet be ready to act or want to go immediately to a shelter. She may wish simply to be *heard* in order to find the support and the courage to act on her own behalf."

Other people who work with abused women suggest that one can express horror at what is happening to a victim of abuse, and that such an expression may actually help the abused woman realize that her partner's behaviour is not acceptable. It is a fine line we must draw between giving an abused woman permission to speak and accepting the abuse, thereby implicitly giving the abuser permission to continue the abuse. One must be careful.

We also need to keep in mind that this may be the first time that the woman has disclosed abuse, and that it could be the **ONLY TIME SHE COMES FORWARD** to discuss her experience of abuse. Therefore, in the course of the dialogue it is important to:

- Unequivocally challenge the violence. There is a strong tendency to blame the victim of violence for inciting a violent attack, so that in turn the victim blames herself. She needs to hear that we care about her safety, that nothing justifies this violence and that we do not condone it. Responses such as "What did you do that made him so angry?" suggest that the blame is hers. Responses such as, "I care about both of you but I can't condone his behaviour," assure the victim that you are willing to support her in making changes.
- Suggest resources. If she is in immediate danger and is seeking protection we need to respond affirmatively. Again, her safety and the safety of her children needs to be our

highest priority. In any case, she needs to know the number of a crisis line, where there is a shelter she can turn to, and what other resources are available to her. Do not suggest marriage counselling. Experience has taught that marriage counselling before the man has learned to control his violent behaviour is at best ineffective and possibly destructive.

- Promise to be there for her. She needs to experience the support of another person and the affirmation of another Christian that she is a worthwhile person whose safety is of paramount importance.
- Assure confidentiality. She needs to know that her trust will not be betrayed and that the pastoral counsellor will not confront her husband without her permission.
- Give her time. Joy Bussert points out, "A battered woman must struggle with almost insurmountable social, emotional, and economic obstacles as she begins to free herself from an abusive situation. She deserves time and patience from her pastoral counsellor as she works through this difficult disentangling process. It is most important that the pastor not impose a time schedule on her, or communicate impatience with her reluctance to act as quickly as one would like."¹³

Responding to the Crisis Call

When a woman in crisis calls on you for help you need to deal with the practical aspects of the crisis, which entail the following six steps:

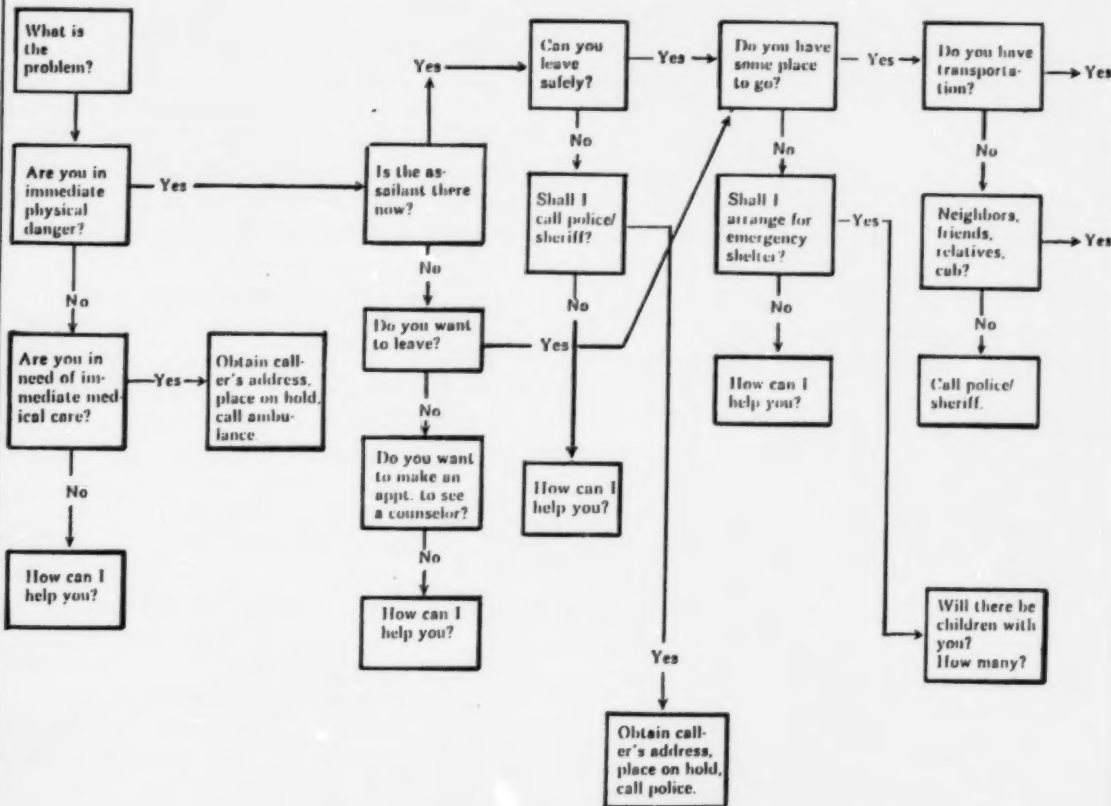
1. Assess the immediate danger of the assaulted woman and her children. (Is she at home now? Is her partner there? Can he hear her? Are the children there? Are there weapons in the house? Does the man have one?)
2. Assess her need for medical attention.
3. Determine her access to resources (i.e. Can she

drive to a shelter? Can she use the phone to call the police?)

4. Assess her need for emergency housing.
5. Refer her to a sympathetic lawyer.
6. Establish ongoing contact.

To respond appropriately to an emergency situation, without flooding the woman with questions, requires calm and some skill on the part of the pastoral worker. The "Flow Chart for Handling Domestic Violence Crisis Calls" may be helpful in illiciting the necessary information from a victim in crisis, and giving an appropriate response.

Flow Chart for Handling Domestic Violence Crisis Calls



From A.W. McEvoy and J.B. Brookings, *Helping Battered Women: A Volunteer's Handbook for Assisting Victims of Marital Violence*. Learning Publications. Used by permission.

Counselling the Assaulted Woman

To help assaulted women, counsellors and advocates must first examine their own values and beliefs.

1. No behaviour of any woman justifies or provokes violence. No woman ever deserves to be hit, shoved, kicked or physically hurt in any way.
2. Women are not masochistic and in no way do they derive any pleasure from being physically hurt or threatened.
3. A major contributing factor to women remaining in violent relationships is the endorsement and teaching by our social institutions that women belong in the home, are less competent than men to succeed in the work force, should defer to the dominance of their husbands, and should be the primary emotional support of the family.
4. In counselling, the problems of the marital relationship cannot be the initial focus. Until all family members are safe, it is too dangerous to discuss problems of the family or the relationship other than the violence.
5. Anyone working with assaulted women must provide role models of competent, successful, assertive women. They must confront and challenge the belief of many assaulted women that they are responsible for the violence and help assaulted women develop a sense of themselves as competent and able to make decisions and choices. By allowing each assaulted woman to make decisions and respecting those decisions even when those decisions are not the ones counsellors would make for themselves, counsellors can powerfully indicate their belief in the woman's strength.

Used by permission from Understanding Wife Assault, Deborah Sinclair.

Responding to a Perpetrator's Disclosure

A violent man may seek help to change his abusive behaviour if:

- his wife has threatened to leave him
- his wife has already left him and refuses to return until he gets help
- he has been ordered by the courts to seek counselling for his violent behaviour
- he has heard of a group program, or perhaps has a problem with drug or alcohol abuse, depression or some other situation.

Most men who abuse their wives *do not* acknowledge that they are responsible for their behaviour when they first seek help.

Just as is the case when a woman discloses abuse, the pastoral worker's first responsibility when we learn that violence is an issue is to work to ensure the safety of the assaulted woman. Secondly, our goals are to assure the safety and well being of the man and to engage him in the counselling process. He may be under emotional stress. He may be depressed or suicidal. He needs professional and/or peer counseling in order to end his violent behaviour. Therapy groups specifically for abusers, statistically speaking, are the best approach.

NOTE: If you think he is likely to endanger his wife, himself, his children or anyone else, intervene immediately. Take any threat seriously. CALL THE POLICE. In many areas of the country the police are now to lay charges against abusive partners themselves. The onus is not on the woman to lay charges. Find out whether the police in your area regularly do lay charges, or are willing to do so if you insist upon it.

When you have established the safety of the family, engage the violent man in the counselling process.

Intervening with the Violent Man

There are three primary tasks at the first stage of intervention. They are:

1. To ensure the safety of the assaulted woman;
2. To ensure the safety of the violent man;
3. To engage the violent man in the counselling process.

1. Your first task is to assess the safety of the assaulted woman.

Questions

Where is she? Where are the children? Are they safe? Has he just abused them? Are they injured? Is he about to abuse them? Ask to speak to the assaulted woman or to get the phone number of where she can be reached.

Purposes

- To ensure the assaulted woman's and the children's safety;
- To assure the violent man that you take his violence seriously;
- To assess his immediate potential for violence.

2. The next task is to assure the safety of the violent man.

Questions

What is his present emotional state? Is he depressed, anxious, enraged? Is he suicidal? Has he ever attempted suicide in the past? Is he on drugs or drinking?

Purposes

- To assess the likelihood of suicidal behaviour;
- To assess the need for immediate addiction intervention;
- To assess the need for immediate psychiatric intervention;
- To assure the offender that you are genu-

inely concerned for his personal safety as well as his family's.

IMPORTANT: If you think he is likely to be dangerous to himself, to his wife, to the children or to anyone, intervene immediately. Take his threats seriously! **CALL THE POLICE.**

3. Once you establish the safety of the family, your next task is to engage the violent man in the counselling process.

Establish some rapport with him. Try to find the part of him in pain and speak to that.

- Establish your credibility with him. Let him know of your experience in this area and your belief that this problem can be solved.
- Clarify your role. Let him know clearly what he can expect of you. For example, you can help him stop his violent behaviour; you cannot get his wife back for him.
- Affirm his ability to change. He is not crazy nor is he a monster. Violence is learned. He can unlearn it.
- Help him explore alternatives to his abusive behaviour. For example, he could talk to a friend or call a distress line.
- Help him begin to identify the consequences of his abusive behaviour, such as criminal charges, possibility of causing permanent injury or death, placing his relationship in jeopardy.
- Let him know what resources are available to assist him in his changes. For example, addiction counselling, group programs for offenders, individual counselling.
- Offer to make him an immediate referral if you are unable to see him yourself, or if there is a better resource available, such as a men's support group.
- Encourage him to consider a temporary separation until he is sure he will not endanger his wife or children.
- If his wife has already left and you know her whereabouts, you cannot tell him where she is but you can assure him of her safety and that his children are being well taken care of.

- If his wife has left, help him understand why she had to do that. For example, she was scared of him and had to leave for safety reasons. Try to enlist his cooperation in the separation.
- Establish ongoing contact.

Used by permission from Understanding Wife Assault, Deborah Sinclair.

Resources Available to Assaulted Wives and Their Families

The women's movement in Canada has been one of the strongest forces in bringing wife assault to public attention, and the women's shelter movement provides one of the best resources available to the abused woman.

MAKE CONTACT WITH THE LOCAL SHELTER OR TRANSITION HOUSE. MAKE THEIR NUMBER AVAILABLE TO ANY WOMAN YOU KNOW OR SUSPECT IS BEING ABUSED.

Many communities, particularly in rural areas, do not have a shelter close by to serve in emergencies. As a long-range goal, lobby for this most important resource.

If there is no shelter in your area there may be a crisis line or a support group for abused women. Call the local hospital or police to get the number and keep it handy.

Other resources available to assaulted wives include:

The Police. In some communities the police are aware and committed to assisting women who have been assaulted by their husbands, and have been instructed to lay charges themselves rather than force the woman to press charges. In other communities they are less helpful. Discuss the issue with the local police to ascertain what assistance they are prepared to give. If neces-

sary, the local churches might do consciousness-raising among the local police force on this issue.

The Hospital. Again, some hospitals are quite helpful and make the phone number of a local shelter or support groups available to women they suspect are victims of wife assault. They may be willing to take photographs as an aid to getting legal protection for the victim. But some hospitals or some doctors ignore the fact that they are treating a patient who is clearly a victim of abuse. Ascertain what attitude prevails at the local hospital and which doctors might be relied upon to give assistance and support to an abused woman. Encourage the local hospitals to adopt an appropriate protocol.

Family Services and Catholic Family Services. Services vary in each area. Investigate what services are available in your community, and if there is a lack of services lobby for change.

Legal Aid and Legal Clinics. Every province in Canada has a legal aid plan to provide legal services to people who are not able to pay for them. Where there is a system of legal clinics, there may be a clinic that specializes in the legal issues associated with wife assault. Find out what legal services are available, and which lawyers in the community are informed about the issue of wife assault and are sympathetic to the needs of an assaulted woman.

Local Counsellors, Therapists and Counselling Services. As mentioned earlier, there is a tendency to treat wife assault as the victim's psychological problem rather than the crime it is. Therefore, a counsellor who takes a passive stand towards an abused client may inadvertently be doing more harm than good. A victim of violence first needs advocacy, not counselling. However, once she is satisfied about her own safety she may want and need long-term counselling in the aftermath of the violence. Seek out counsellors who are familiar with the counselling needs of assaulted women, so that referrals can be made where appropriate. Ask

the staff at shelters for the names of such counsellors. Some shelters provide counselling for non-residents and hire professional staff to do it.

In Conclusion

The churches are uniquely called upon to provide for the pastoral needs of assaulted women and the perpetrators of these crimes. Churches are now in a period of "catch up" and need to develop our own resources in order to minister more effectively to families broken by violence. Most importantly, as pastoral workers we need to admit to the violence in our midst, speak out about our experience of violence or confess our part when we are perpetrating it. We must hear the women in our own congregation and have our faith informed by their stories. Our faithfulness to God may be measured by our faithfulness to victims of violence in their hour of need.

Footnotes

1. This scene in the House of Commons was recorded by video camera and is reproduced in the video *One in Ten*, by Ecumenical Family Ministries, available through denominational offices. Further information from The United Church House, Division of Mission in Canada, 85 St. Clair Avenue East, Toronto, ON M4T 1M8.

2. Conversation with London Police Chief, John Robinson, January 29, 1987, reported in Gail Golding's *Hands to End Violence Against Women*, p.3. Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 77 Charles Street West., Toronto, ON M5S 1K5.

3. D.G. Dutton, quoted from the Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare and Social Affairs: Inquiry into Violence in the Family, 25: 6, February 1982.

4. *Marriage and Divorce Today: The Professional Newsletter for Family Therapy Practitioners*, 10, No. 9 (Oct, 1984) p.1, quoted in *Wife Assault in Canada*, a fact sheet put out by Education Wife Assault, 427 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1X7.

5. Russell, (1980) quoted in *Response to Violence in the Family and Sexual Assault*, Centre for Women Policy Studies, Washington D.C., 7 No. 2, March/April 1984, p.15.

6. Shields and Hanneke (1981), Doron (1980), and Frieze (1980), quoted in Russell, p.14.

7. This list was adapted from *No Fear in Love; A Protocol on Wife Abuse for Church Staff* produced by the Winnipeg Conference Task Force on Family Violence, The United Church of Canada, 1987.

8. Pages 26, 27 and part of 28, adapted by David W. Currie from his book, *The Abusive Husband: An Approach to Intervention*. Available free of charge from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Brooke Claxton Building, 7th Floor, Room 700, Health and Welfare Canada, Ottawa, ON K1A 1B5.

9. Roger Langley and Richard Levy, *Wife Beating; The Silent Crisis*. Pocket Book, 1979.

10. Diane Goldstein and Alan Rosenbaum, "An Evaluation of Self-Esteem of Maritally Violent Men," *Family Relations*, July 1985, pp.405-428.

11. *Ibid.*, p.428.

12. *No Fear in Love*, p.10.

13. Points adapted from Joy Bussert's *Battered Women; From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment*, Lutheran Church in America, 1986, pp.72-75. Quote from p.75.

CHILD ABUSE

"I never considered the issue of child abuse in our church until I was a counsellor at our youth camp one summer. I pulled the t-shirt off this kid and saw the cigarette burns on his back. Then I thought about it."

Our desire to support family life reflects our desire that children be raised and nurtured in the intimate environment of a loving home. When a child is brought to a church for baptism or dedication the entire Christian community commits itself to supporting the family in the process of nurturing the child's life and faith. In confronting the issue of child abuse, we confront our own failures.

To confront child neglect in our own communities we first must admit to having failed in providing parents with adequate emotional and practical supports. It may be necessary for us to reconsider our priorities in ministry within the churches, and the use of our economic resources in our whole society.

To confront the physical abuse of children we have to confront our own attitudes toward violence and towards coercion as a means of exercising social control.

To confront the sexual abuse of children we have to confront our own attitudes that contribute to sexual exploitation, where sex is something someone does to someone else, an exercise of power rather than a free and mutual expression of who we are.

What Do We Mean By Child Abuse?

We define child abuse as any neglect, deprivation or mistreatment that results in physical or psychological harm to the child, and any sexual molestation of a child.

Neglect is a form of abuse that occurs when a child's basic physical, psychological and educational needs are not met. While child neglect may sometimes be ascribed to the inadequate financial resources of the family, neglect can and does occur in all classes and races in Canada.

Physical abuse has occurred when an adult has beaten, shaken, burned, or in any other way harmed the child. Physical abuse often occurs under the guise of discipline. The belief that "to spare the rod is to spoil the child," that it is a parent's right to strike a child for the child's own good, has allowed many instances of child abuse to go undetected and for battered children to remain unprotected.

A child has experienced *emotional abuse* if he or she is being isolated for long periods of time, being belittled and ridiculed, or threatened with future abuse. Children also experience emotional abuse when they witness their mother being abused by their father or any other person

with whom their mother has an intimate relationship.

Sexual abuse of children is any kind of inappropriate touching by any adult of a child under the age of consent. Since a child is not capable of freely consenting to a sexual act with an adult, any sexual act between a child and adult is sexual abuse.

Physical Abuse

The scope of the problem

Because some degree of corporal punishment is so widely accepted in Canada, it is impossible to estimate the extent of physical abuse. Clearly, this is an ethical problem, not simply a statistical problem. How much physical pain inflicted on a child is too much? Perhaps we need to ask ourselves, why is it legitimate to strike our children when it is wrong and in fact illegal to strike anyone else?

The persistent use of corporal punishment in our society works against battered children in two ways. First, it tends to obscure the fact that battering has occurred. While the parental pattern of battering is actually quite different than the occasional use of corporal punishment, to an outsider witnessing one instance of battering the difference may not be clear. Second, because many parents feel some guilt about their use of corporal punishment, they refuse to confront the more serious problem of child battering. The myth that any parent who is pushed too far could be a child batterer paralyzes us.

In fact, most parents will not batter their children no matter how much stress they experience, and no matter what behaviour their children exhibit. Nevertheless, each year across Canada hundreds of cases of child battering where the child sustains serious injuries, come to the attention of doctors, teachers, and social workers. These children have been punched, kicked, pinched, beaten with whips, cooking utensils, electric

cords, belts, tree branches, or high-heeled shoes. They may be tied up, locked in a closet, flung against hard objects, stabbed, burned, plunged into cold rivers or scalded with hot water or coffee. Contact burns may be inflicted on a child with a cigarette, or by placing the child on a hot stove or a surface heating unit. The attack on an infant or child is usually made by one parent, with the other parent permitting it to occur.¹

What causes parents to abuse children physically?

The factors contributing to child abuse are complex. Most abuse occurs when the parents are under stress, experiencing social or economic difficulties. However, since many people experience intense stress and still continue to care for their children, stress can only be viewed as a trigger, not the whole story. No amount of stress serves as an excuse for violence. A pattern of abuse in a family is basically a power structure within the family, wherein one member achieves power over another person through either overt or covert coercion.

Sometimes in a family with several children, one child alone is subjected to abuse. One reason this child is singled out might relate to the circumstances of their birth. Research indicates that children are more often subject to abuse if they were born prematurely, had some disability that necessitated their being removed from their parents for a time, or had some illness during infancy that increased the level of stress their parents experienced. The other children may or may not be aware that the abuse is occurring. Children with special needs, those that are physically or mentally disabled, may be at greater risk simply because they may be less able to seek protection.

A parent with poor mental health, who was abused as a child, who has drug or alcohol abuse problems, or is experiencing marital problems is more likely to abuse their child. There is some association between alcohol abuse and violence against children, just as there is between alcohol

and wife assault, although researchers stress that this alcohol abuse is only a contributing factor; it is not the cause of the violence. Alcohol-related violence is almost exclusively related to male violence. It may be true that when alcohol lowers inhibitions, attitudes of male dominance are given fuller scope.

A profile of the physically abusing parent

It used to be believed that women were the major abusers of children. While child abuse literature often stresses cases where women are the batterers, records show almost a fifty-fifty split. There does appear to be a connection between wife assault and child abuse. In the U.S. research shows "that while males are the abusers in only forty per cent of all officially reported child abuse and neglect cases, males are the perpetrators of seventy per cent of the child abuse cases that also involved an incidence of spouse abuse... The research also indicates that in the other thirty per cent of officially reported cases in the same household in which the man is assaulting the mother, the mother is assaulting the child." ²

Another factor is the abuse that the abusing parent suffered as a child. An abused child is more likely to grow up to be an abusive parent than is a child raised in a home free from abuse and serves to conceal it at the same time.

What must be of particular concern to people within Christian churches is the fact that among people who are actively involved in their religion there is a greater than average adherence to a strong, rigid, authoritarian attitude toward child-parent relationships. This attitude can lead to physical abuse.

Abusive parents tend to display similar characteristics. These characteristics include:

- immaturity
- low self-esteem
- difficulty in seeking and finding pleasure and satisfaction
- social isolation

- misperceptions of the child, and unrealistic expectations for the child
- a strong belief in the value of punishment
- a serious lack of empathy in relation to the child.³

Physical abuse of children occurs in rural and urban environments, in families of all classes, in single parent homes as well as in nuclear and extended families, regardless of the parents' educational background or level of intelligence. It is not particularly prevalent among very young parents, as was once believed. The average age of the abusing mother is twenty-six; the abusing father approximately thirty.⁴

Identifying physical abuse

Even children who are old enough to articulate what is happening to them at home are often reluctant to seek outside help when they are abused. They fear retaliation, that their family will be torn apart, or that they will be taken away from their family if they reveal the abuse they suffer.

However, early detection can lessen the extent of abuse the child will suffer. Once abuse is identified, support and counselling can be offered to the child. Parents can learn better parenting skills, the offending parent can be removed or a more suitable environment can be provided for the child.

IT IS THEREFORE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT ANYONE WORKING CLOSELY WITH CHILDREN LEARN TO DETECT SIGNS OF ABUSE.

Signs of physical abuse vary with the age of the child. Abuse can actually occur before the child is born. The pregnant woman engaged in substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, or tobacco) may cause physical damage to the fetus. The woman's partner may abuse the fetus by beating her in the stomach, which can cause the woman to miscarry. As previously noted, violence against women by men with whom they are

intimate often first occurs during a pregnancy. Mary Volk, in her study, *The Battered Child in Canada* suggests that, "Whether on a conscious or subconscious level, violence toward a pregnant wife may be a form of prenatal child abuse or filicide. Many researchers believe it may be a husband's attempt to terminate pregnancy and relieve him of the impending stress of yet another child."⁵

With an infant, apart from obvious physical signs of abuse such as burns, fractures, or welts, the syndrome known simply as "failure to thrive" may indicate physical abuse or neglect. It is characterized by chronic undernutrition of the infant or young child, and very slow weight gain. While for 25 per cent of children who suffer from this syndrome the cause is organic, for another 25 per cent the cause is that the child is not being fed properly, and it is believed that for the other 50 per cent of children the cause is extreme neglect or distorted parenting.⁶

A physically abused toddler or young child may

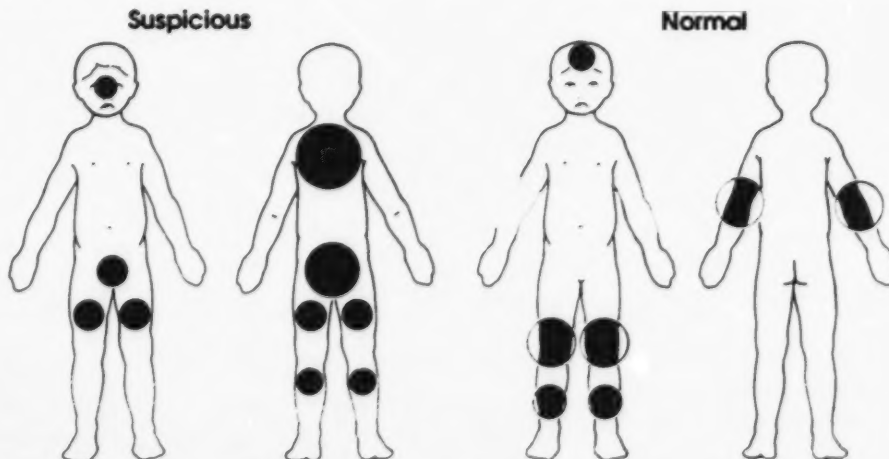
be slow in their general development. Other signs include:

- repeated injuries
- neglected appearance
- disruptive behaviour
- passive, withdrawn behaviour, or unnaturally calm behaviour indicating a general withdrawal. Intentionally seeking punishment
- causing harm to other children or to animals
- regression to an earlier level of development (i.e. a child who is toilet trained may begin wetting again)
- a parent who is extremely critical or has unrealistic expectations of their children's behaviour and school performance
- a family or child who is extremely isolated.

Emotional Abuse

Clearly, any child suffering physical abuse will experience emotional trauma as well, but children can suffer emotional abuse when no physical abuse has occurred. Emotional abuse is a difficult problem to define, and impossible to

Childhood injuries are common and do not in themselves indicate abuse, but a pattern of injuries may indicate abuse. The following chart depicts the pattern of injuries that are typical of normal childhood bumps and bruises compared with the pattern of injuries that may indicate abuse. The suspicious pattern of injuries should alert a caring adult that abuse may be occurring.



From *The Abused Child: A Shared Responsibility*, Linda Reid, for the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario, 1985.

quantify. What is the measure of a shattered self-image?

Emotional abuse or neglect can take many forms. An infant may be left in the crib for long periods of time with a bottle propped up, giving the baby inadequate physical and intellectual stimulation. A recent study in the United States indicated that inadequate nurturing was the most common form of emotional neglect, and that it resulted in the the highest number (74 per cent) of demonstrably serious injuries/impairments such as attempted suicides, severe failure-to-thrive, and drug overdoses.⁷

Emotional abuse may entail isolating or confining a child, encouraging or permitting seriously maladaptive behaviour, habitually scapegoating a child, denigrating or belittling the child or impeding normal development in other ways. The pattern may be summarized as follows:

"There seem to be four central themes that occur in the emotionally abusive family. First, the infant or child is penalized for positive normal behaviour such as smiling, mobility exploration, vocalization, and manipulation of objects. Second, the parent or caretaker discourages the infant or child from bonding or forming a normal attachment to the parent or caregiver. Third, the infant or child is penalized for showing signs of positive self-esteem. Fourth, the infant or child is penalized for using interpersonal skills that are needed for adequate performance in non-familial contexts, such as school and in friendship groups."⁸

Role reversal, when the child takes on the emotional role of the adult, is another common form of emotional abuse. Parents who did not receive adequate love and acceptance as children may have difficulty giving to their children what they never received themselves. They may look to the children to give to them the love they missed. They may have unrealistic expectations about what a child can provide them with emotionally,

and feel once again the disappointment they experienced as a child. In this way, a pattern of emotional abuse may repeat itself over several generations.

Signals of Emotional Abuse

A child who exhibits any of the following characteristics may be suffering from emotional abuse:

- extreme lack of confidence
- withdrawal or depression
- extreme aggressiveness or passivity when playing with other children
- excessive desire for a leader's attention
- over-participation or involvement in too many activities
- an exaggerated need to succeed or win
- inappropriate adult behaviour, disciplining others
- regressed behaviour, such as wetting after successful toilet training, throwing tantrums, excessive crying
- apathy, repetitive rhythmic movements, lack of verbal or physical communication
- antisocial or obvious delinquent behaviour
- eating or sleeping disorders
- physically harming themselves.

Children who witness abuse against their mothers

Another serious form of emotional abuse occurs when a child witnesses his or her mother being abused. The trauma a child experiences as a witness to violence against his or her own mother is similar in many ways to the mother's experience of that violence. The child may exhibit similar behaviour to the mother, or signal the abuse either by externalizing behaviour (aggression) or by internalizing the conflicts they experience, exhibiting anxiety or depression. They may mimic the abuser's behaviour and emotionally abuse or hit their mother, or they may try to protect her.

These children's problems are reflected in their

level of school achievement and in their peer relationships. The abuse may carry over into distorted views of relationships between men and women and between boys and girls. A child who witnesses abuse might condone violence as a way of resolving conflict. He or she may experience a high level of anxiety and sleeping problems, and ambivalent feelings toward the father or step-father.

Women's shelters have tried valiantly to address the problems children face. Many shelters provide individual or group counselling for children, and/or routinely make referrals for counselling. Newfoundland and Alberta, recognizing that children who witness their mother being assaulted are also in need of protection, have incorporated protection for such children in the Child Welfare Acts. However, there is legitimate concern that laws intended to provide protection for children might hamper women from disclosing abuse themselves and thus worsen the situation for both the women and their children. Nevertheless, we must recognize that children who witness abuse against their mothers are in need of immediate and long-term support, and that at the present time such support is woefully inadequate.

Child Neglect

Definitions of neglect usually focus on acts of omission by the parent or caretaker, such as failure to provide adequate food, clothing, medical attention, supervision, education and the child's other vital needs. Instances of child neglect include:

- abandonment or lack of supervision over long periods of time
- nutritional neglect, inadequate quality or quantity of food
- medical and dental neglect
- educational neglect, refusal to let a child attend school or allowing chronic truancy
- inappropriate or insufficient clothing.

Sometimes failure to provide for these needs reflects a lack of resources, money, and education available to the parent, rather than a lack of parental concern. Therefore, in some instances of neglect, we as a society are partly to blame. Parenting education, increased support for handicapped parents, job training and quality daycare for working parents, as well as adequate financial assistance for unemployed parents would ensure that more parents in Canada are in a position to adequately provide for their children.

But it is not true that all child neglect results from poverty. Some parents with plenty of money, intellectual capacity and education nevertheless neglect their children. There is no single explanation for child neglect. It is difficult to predict high-risk situations, yet time is of the essence when a child is suffering neglect. Permanent and irreversible damage can result in the child's decreased intellectual capacity, poor physical development, and/or emotional illness, particularly when neglect occurs in infancy and early childhood. Therefore, everyone in contact with small children should be alert to signs of neglect to ensure that a neglecting parent will be offered assistance and that the neglected child is offered protection.

The Signs of a Neglected Child

The Child's Appearance *Look for*

- persistent hunger; malnutrition; underweight; dehydration
- poor hygiene; dirtiness; lice; skin disorders associated with improper hygiene
- persistent fatigue and listlessness
- inappropriate clothing for the weather
- inadequate supervision; child left in the care of another child too young to protect him/her
- unattended sores and cuts and other medical needs.

The Child's Behaviour *Look for*

- demands for constant attention from the leader
- lack of parental participation and interest
- indications that no one is ever home to look after him/her
- obvious lack of energy when playing.

From The Abused Child: A Shared Responsibility, Linda Reid, for the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario, 1985.

Sexual Abuse of Children

The testimonies of adult survivors of sexual abuse have recently forced the public to address the issue, to seek out ways of protecting children from sexual assault, and to support adult survivors. Research into the sexual abuse of children in Canada indicates that as many as one out of every two females and one in three males have been victims of one or more unwanted sexual acts, and that four in five of these sexual acts had been first committed against the person when they were children or youths. Three in five sexually abused children have been threatened or physically coerced by their assailants.⁹

The child usually knows the assailant. About one in four of the assailants is a family member or a person in a position of trust and about half are friends or acquaintances. Only one in six is a stranger. Virtually all assailants, 99 per cent, are males.¹⁰ A boy who has been sexually abused by a man might be particularly reluctant to report the abuse.

Any child victim of sexual abuse is unlikely to seek outside help, at least not while they remain a child in the home where they are experiencing the abuse. Hence, most people who work in the field conclude that sexual abuse is grossly under-reported. The majority of victims or their families do not seek assistance from public services.

When they do, they most frequently turn to the police or doctors.¹¹

Why are children sexually abused?

Factors contributing to sexual abuse of children are somewhat different than physical abuse. When the assailant is the father or step-father assaulting his daughter, he is very unlikely to admit to what he is doing or that there is anything wrong in his actions. This suggests that some of the same dynamics are recurring as when a husband assaults his wife. He may simply believe that what he is doing is his right, that a man's home is his castle and therefore that everyone residing therein is his subject. This might not be a conscious assumption but nevertheless may serve to justify his behaviour to himself.

Sexual abuse that involves an older sibling abusing a younger child in the family may indicate mental illness or a dysfunctional family. Sometimes an older sibling who has been sexually abused, in turn sexually abuses a younger child. An older relative of the family may abuse a young child because they can express their sexual needs or their need for affection only in a context of control and domination.

The difficulty the sexually abused child faces in disclosing the abuse is compounded by the fact that, although many parents acknowledge that sexual abuse is a problem, they rarely discuss it with their young children.¹² A young child may not have the ability to describe his or her experience unless the parents are alert to subtle messages, such as "I don't like Mr. Kringle anymore." As well, the abuser uses many tactics to silence the child, threatening harm or punishment of the child or someone else. The assailant may refer to the abuse as "our secret" and emotionally manipulate the child to maintain the secret.

Perhaps the best way parents can offer their children protection against childhood sexual abuse is to speak frankly with them, reminding them at intervals that no one has the right to touch

them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, and that they are under no obligation ever to keep "secrets" if it makes them uncomfortable.

Signs of sexual abuse

Signs of sexual abuse differ in some ways from physical abuse, and may be particularly evident as children reach adolescence, but even a young child may signal experience of sexual abuse in one or several of the following ways:

- acting threatened or overly loving toward a perpetrator
- excessive masturbation
- sexually abusing a younger child
- showing sexual behaviour in their play
- regressing to behaviours such as bed wetting
- becoming pregnant at a very young age
- not being allowed a normal social life
- not being allowed to date at an appropriate age

The Signs of a Sexually Abused Child

The Child's Appearance

Look for

- difficulty in walking or sitting
- pain, aching, bleeding, and bruises in the genital or anal area
- torn, stained or bloody underwear
- pregnancy
- venereal diseases, especially in pre-teens.

The Child's Behaviour

Look for

- reluctance to participate in physical activities
- unusual knowledge of sexual behaviour demonstrated through play or conversation
- reluctance to undress or take a shower in the presence of others
- reports stories of sexual contact with an adult or older child
- fear of normal physical contact, especially when initiated by a leader

- destructive and delinquent behaviour during recreational activities
- prone to running away from home
- depression/suicide (attempted or gestures of).

From The Abused Child: A Shared Responsibility, Linda Reid, for the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario, 1985.

A child who has experienced sexual abuse for many years is more likely to speak out about the abuse as she or he approaches adulthood. In adolescence an abused child may act out their feelings of anger or self-destructive attitudes that resulted from being sexually abused. Social workers and agencies who work with delinquent adolescents have noted that a very large percentage of clients have suffered prior sexual abuse. Extremely difficult behaviour such as delinquency, truancy and running away, may indicate that an adolescent has suffered sexual abuse. It needs to be addressed so that the victim can discover more constructive means of dealing with the abuse already suffered and perhaps still being experienced.

Adult survivors of sexual abuse

Years, even decades later, problems can plague an adult who was sexually assaulted as a child. The earlier the abuse started and the longer it continued, the more difficult it becomes for the survivor to disclose it and to confront their own feelings. Sometimes feelings surface when their own child reaches the age when their abuse began.

We are slow in coming to an understanding that the sexual abuse suffered by a child cannot simply be dismissed as "something that happened a long time ago." To lay the burden on victims to "forgive and forget" is to increase their sense of isolation. The victims of abuse were probably made to feel responsible for the abuse, and often they have lingering feelings of guilt and shame about their sexuality. They need time and understanding to sort out their feelings.

Being able to tell the whole story, in detail, may be the first step toward healing.

Adult survivors often need and want professional counselling, in which case a referral is most appropriate. They may also have deep and searching questions about the nature of God to explore with you. Since it is common for both the victim and the assailant to blame the child for "provoking" sexual abuse, adult survivors often still carry a heavy burden of guilt and self-hate. They should be encouraged to determine their own time frame for their healing process, and to resist being hurried. People working with victims of sexual abuse must take care not to impose their theological and faith positions on the victims. They need the gift of your time, someone willing to listen and respond non-judgmentally to their search for wholeness and health.

Self-help groups for survivors of sexual abuse have formed in many communities across Canada. Encourage adult survivors to contact a group directly, or by phone or mail if there is not a group in the immediate area, so they can experience the support of people who may best understand a victim's feelings.

Requirement to Report Child Abuse

In Canada there is a legislated requirement to report suspected child abuse to a Children's Aid Society or a Family and Children's Service office. While the legislation is slightly different in each province, there are particular requirements for professionals, including clergy, to report any case of suspected abuse. In most provinces this requirement is extended to all persons who become aware that child abuse has occurred.

The intent of these laws is clear; the child's protection must be our foremost concern. However, the requirement to report abuse may pose dilemmas to some people working in the church context, particularly since they may have

close relationships with the whole family or have a confidential relationship with the offender, as in the case of a private confession. Some priests who have heard the confession of an abusive parent have handled the situation by stating clearly that they are obliged to report the abuse, but can allow the confessor to report the abuse themselves first in their presence.

Explain why it is necessary to report abuse and help an individual to report the abuse directly in your presence. Self-reporting is often less threatening to the people directly involved, but again, we must remember that the safety and health of the child is our foremost concern and a high moral responsibility.

Pastoral Interventions

When child abuse is suspected turning the case over to a Children's Aid Society or the local Children's and Family Services office, rather than intervening directly, is advised. The local Children's Aid Society or Child and Family Services Office has expertise in interviewing the child and the parents and, since reporting to the Society is mandatory in any case, their intervention can save the child from having painfully to recount their story of abuse all over again.

However, because of heavy case loads and sometimes insufficient resources within an agency, immediate assistance to the child may not be forthcoming. Also, in some provinces the agency has interpreted its mandate as crisis intervention rather than as a resource for treatment. If they determine that the abuse the child has experienced is not severe enough to warrant removing the child from the home, or if that the abuse cannot be proven, then they may decide against pursuing the case. The result may be, from the child's perspective, that he or she sought help and that nothing happened. The child may even feel that their situation was made worse.

We must, then, be prepared to do effective follow-up and to research what other resources can

be made available to the child and the parents in our communities. Some local resources may include:

- a crisis line that an older child can call
- the local hospital and affiliated programs and services
- mental health clinics
- services available through the local school such as the nurse, a social worker, psychologist, guidance counsellor or a gifted, caring teacher
- the public health nurse and/or homemaker service, particularly useful in providing practical support and education for families in need
- local self-help groups
- parenting education programs.

Guidelines for Talking With Children Who Have Been Abused

When a child discloses abuse to you directly, it is helpful to remember the following guidelines:

- Listen calmly. Do not express shock or disbelief at the child's story. We need to sort out our own feelings in our own time when we learn that abuse has occurred; but at the time when a child is disclosing abuse, we have to stay in the present. *Be present* to the child, affirming the child's feelings, reassuring the child that in speaking up about abuse they have not done anything wrong.
- The child needs to know that they *are believed*. It is highly unlikely that the child will "make up" a story of abuse or "just imagine" abuse, but in any case when a child is telling their story it is not necessary to be investigating it. Our role is that of *listener*.
- Let the child discuss their experience in their own words. The child may not have the vocabulary to describe a sexual assault but *do not probe or encourage a detailed description*

of the abuse, and don't attempt to introduce more precise language. It may alarm or confuse the child, and it can also affect any subsequent court proceedings.

- Our first responsibility is to ascertain if the child is in *immediate danger* and to respond to the child's urgent needs, particularly if she or he needs medical attention. A child who has been sexually assaulted needs medical attention.
- Make it clear to the child that you cannot keep the abuse a secret. Explain that there are people who can help them and their parents. If the child is capable, give the child the option of reporting the abuse directly to the appropriate agency.
- Reassure the child that you will stay with them and remain available to help them in the future. *Make a safety plan with the child.* Ensure that the child has a phone number to call in an emergency or a place where the child can run to in an emergency.

In many communities there are far too few resources available for abused children or the process of obtaining help may be long and drawn out. Authorities may not be able to substantiate the abuse, particularly if the child later denies it, and so there may be little that can be done immediately to change the child's situation. The reassurance that you still care and will remain available to the child is extremely important.

When a Parent Reports Abuse

A parent who reports that their child is being abused, whether they are the perpetrator or whether the abuser is their spouse or someone with whom they have an intimate relationship, is probably seeking help to end the abuse. They must be made aware that the pastoral care worker's most immediate responsibility, as well as theirs, is the child's safety. The legal require-

ment that you report the abuse must also be made clear.

The need for professional help for the abuser, or for a parent living with an abuser, cannot be overstressed. If the mother is being abused herself by someone with whom she has an intimate relationship, she may get help for herself and her child or children through a local women's shelter. Most shelters are keenly aware of the relationship between wife assault and child abuse and have good programs and counselling available for children.

A man who is abusing either or both his wife and children should be encouraged to get counselling specifically for abusers. However, since the abuse will probably not end if the offender and victim remain in the same household, and since removing children from the home has proved to compound their sense of guilt and isolation, the offender should be encouraged to remove himself from the home, at least temporarily.

The spiritual and ethical concerns that an abuser might share with a pastoral worker also need to be addressed. These require considerable skill on the part of the pastoral counsellor, since denial and manipulative behaviour is extremely common among sexual abusers who have developed such responses in order to conceal the abuse and force their child victims to do so also.

The first obligation remains: to secure the safety and health of the victim/s of abuse. Neither the counsellor nor the abuser is free to explore the spiritual consequences of the abuse or issues of forgiveness and reconciliation until the violence has stopped, and there is a system in place that assures the victim's continued safety, and assures that the victim's rights and spiritual integrity are protected.

Footnotes

1. Mary Van Stolk, *The Battered Child in Canada*. Revised Edition, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1978, p.5.
2. *Ibid.*, p.7.
3. Pamela D. Mayhall and Katherine Eastlack Norgard, *Child Abuse and Neglect; Sharing Responsibility*. John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1983, p.119.
4. Stolk, p.7.
5. *Ibid.*, p.6.
6. Mayhall and Norgard, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, p.58.
7. *Ibid.*, p.163.
8. *Ibid.*, p.159.
9. *Sexual Offences Against Children, Vol. I and II and Summary*. The Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youths, appointed by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, The Minister of National Health and Welfare, Government of Canada, 1984, (commonly referred to as "The Badgley Report"), p.1-2.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Margaret O. Hyde, *Sexual Abuse; Let's Talk About It*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1984, p.31-2.

For notes

ELDER ABUSE

"We who are old know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times, but something to be carried high. If it is a long defeat it is also a victory, meaningful for the initiates of time, if not for those who have come less far."

Florida Scott-Maxwell *The Measure of My Days* ¹

Florida Scott-Maxwell is one of many elderly people who have taken the time to share their stories which challenge our stereotypes of the elderly. While we might fear old age as a time when our life is waning, she testifies that the contrary is equally true:

"...We also find that as we age we are more alive than seems likely, convenient or even bearable. Too often our problem is the fervour of life within us. My dear fellow octogenarians, how are we to carry so much life, and what are we to do with it?"²

Our scriptures are filled with positive answers to Scott-Maxwell's question, "How are we to carry so much life?" God continues to surprise the elderly. Sarah and Abraham have their first child when they are old, and Abraham is so taken aback he laughs at God's message (*Genesis 18*). Jacob's great prophecy is given in his old age (*Genesis 49-50*) and Moses continues leading the people through the desert until God finally blesses him in his last days with a glimpse of the promised land. We read, "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated" (*Deuteronomy 34:7*). Ruth and her elderly mother-in-law Naomi form a lasting bond of love that is an example for all Israel. Naomi takes Ruth's newborn son to her breast, and the women assure

Naomi that this child is a sign of love, "a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him" (*Ruth 4:14-16*). Job keeps his faith into his old age, lives to see his health and fortune restored, "And Job died, an old man, and full of days" (*Job 42:17*).

However, our modern culture highly values youthfulness and material productivity. We don't usually view aging as a positive, growing experience, but fear old age and loathe signs of our own aging. Fear and loathing? These are powerful ingredients in the problem of elder abuse in Canada.

Furthermore, our first intimate experience of old age is usually not our own but that of our parents and grandparents. They are people about whom we have complicated, perhaps unresolved, feelings and toward whom we have direct responsibilities. This explains why elder abuse is most often a family affair.

In Canada by the year 2000 it is expected that nearly 12 per cent of the population, 3.4 million people, will be at least 65 years of age.

Generally we're living longer and having fewer

children. Our increased mobility means that adult children are often geographically, if not emotionally distant and unable to take daily responsibility for their elderly relatives. These demographic changes mean that the problems of the elderly will become more pressing and demand more of the church's resources and attention.

Definitions

What do we mean by elder abuse? To date the problem has received very little professional attention and remains ill-defined, but it entails:

- **Financial abuse**, fraud and theft or misuse of property and money, and pension cheques;
- **Physical abuse**, inflicting physical injury, including withholding personal care, medical care or food, inappropriate use of restraints, and leaving nonambulatory persons unattended for long periods which results in vermin infestation or ulcerated skin. Neglect is perhaps the most prevalent form of physical abuse. The misuse of medication, overmedicating a person to keep them "more manageable" or failing to administer needed medication are other forms of physical abuse;
- **Psychological abuse** includes verbal assaults, insults or humiliation, ridicule, threats, provocation of fear, isolation, or a forced change in an elderly person's living arrangements.

The Extent of Elder Abuse

We do not know the extent of elder abuse in Canada because definitions have not been firmly established, incidents frequently go unreported, and there is very little research being done on this serious problem. A study done in Manitoba in 1982 suggests that 2.2 per cent of that province's elderly population are abused³ but this is generally thought to be a rather conservative estimate. Similar studies done in the United States suggest

that about 4 per cent of the elderly are victims of abuse.⁴

Who Is Abused?

While the majority of elderly people in Canada are healthy, mobile, independent and alert, those most subject to abuse don't enjoy good mental and physical health. Anyone may be abused, but the elderly who are most often abused are:

- women over the age of 75;
- frail with physical and/or mental disabilities;
- often unable to provide for their own needs and perhaps in need of protection;
- living with their abusers; and
- frequently reluctant or unwilling to report abuse that has already occurred.⁵

It is important for pastoral care workers to remember these characteristics when planning for effective ministry with the elderly. We might fail to recognize the needs, or indeed even the presence of those most at risk of abuse in our church communities. Most churches are not wheel-chair accessible so the elderly who lack transportation, good health, or assistance may be unable to attend services regularly.

Why Are Elderly People Abused?

Elderly people are vulnerable to abuse for many reasons. The lack of alternatives for shelter, the lack of support services, poverty, fear of being institutionalized, and shame at having raised a child who abuses them may compel an elderly person to remain in an abusive situation.

There are also complex psychological reasons that can lead to abuse. These have been somewhat illuminated by counsellors and researchers who have examined families as a *system* of relationships. Within the family's system, unresolved tensions between a parent and child can result in an adult child abusing the parent once the parent is viewed as powerless to protect him

or herself. Arthur H. Becker states in his book, *Ministry with Older Persons; a Guide for Clergy and Congregations* (an excellent resource for anyone working with elderly persons) that:

"Several decades of experience of family therapists, as well as careful research, have identified a set of characteristic interactions within troubled families. Probably the most common of these is the process of scapegoating. Another type of interaction is role inversion or role reversal. This tends to occur somewhat naturally with middle-generation children who find themselves gradually becoming the parent of their parents, often out of necessity. In these instances the children take over the duties of parenting. Such role inversion also tends to regenerate some of the original conflicted relationships developed in the family of origin."⁶

Role reversal can result in a middle-aged person attempting to give better care to the parent than the original parent gave to his or her child. Unfortunately, the motive of the middle-aged person is to satisfy his or her own needs and the real needs of the elderly parent may be misunderstood or overlooked. Feelings of guilt or resentment develop on both sides of the relationship. Role reversal can also result in the middle-aged offspring seeking revenge for the real or perceived deprivations they suffered as children.⁷

Whether the elderly person's offspring are killing them with kindness or acting out pent up anger, the end result may be similar; the elder is being denied autonomy and responsibility as an adult. The psychological reality of the offspring in no way excuses this abuse, even if it serves as a partial explanation.

Another pattern that has been noted by those who work with abused elderly people is a high incidence of abuse suffered by people who are being cared for by mentally or physically disabled adult offspring. The parent may have lived and

cared for this person well into the son or daughter's adulthood and may still habitually attempt to protect them. Now if the parent needs care and special attention, the disabled offspring feels incapable of providing it, and the elderly person may suffer abuse rather than seek outside help.

Stress is another factor contributing to elder abuse. The elder's offspring may face concerns about teenage children, they may be reaching retirement age themselves, or may have failing health or decreased mobility and increased financial concerns. Often adults caring for their elderly parents complain that they themselves feel emotionally abused by the parent. Personal, environmental and economic stresses can trigger abuse.

The lack of support service and alternative housing does not justify abuse, but it indicates that the prevention and alleviation of elder abuse is a social as well as an individual responsibility. It requires us to reconsider our values and priorities personally and collectively.

Rights of the Elderly:

- having basic necessities met, such as food and decent housing.
- feeling useful and respected.
- having adequate medical care.
- obtaining employment based on merit.
- sharing in the community's recreational and educational resources.
- having moral and financial support from the family and community.
- having access to knowledge on how to improve later life and the resources that enable improvement.
- living and dying with dignity.⁸

Reporting Abuse

It is very common for the victim of elder abuse to fail to report the abuse. The reasons again are complex. First, the person might be physically

unable to report it, or might fear being institutionalized if the abuse is disclosed. She or he might fear recrimination as a result of the report, and an escalation of the abuse. Or, since the abuser is most likely to be the child of the victim or the child's spouse, the victim might feel ashamed of their adult offspring.

For these reasons some provinces have passed legislation requiring professionals to report all cases of abuse, and other provinces are considering mandatory reporting legislation. These laws are similar to the legislation related to child abuse and, while they are designed to protect the rights of the elderly, some people fear that in practice they might deny the elderly their autonomy and hence their dignity. Increased institutionalization of the elderly might be the unintended result. It also must be recognized that, even if more reports are made, unless more resources are made available to the abused elderly we have done little to ensure that the abuse will end.

This is not to suggest that identifying cases of elder abuse is not a community responsibility of particular concern for pastoral care workers. It is to suggest that our orientation is toward empowering the elderly rather than merely attempting to protect them.

What Can We Do to Empower the Elderly?

We can help victims of elder abuse help themselves when we:

- Learn to identify cases of elder abuse.
- Develop the necessary skills for intervening in crisis situations where an elderly person is being abused.
- Listen to elderly people; hear their stories and pay attention to their concerns about themselves and other people, and respond in a way that respects their abilities, autonomy, and privacy. Knowing that they are valued is itself empowering.
- Read and talk to people about the problems of the elderly. Obtain and share accurate information about the needs of the elderly. Explore what housing alternatives exist in the community. Study the problems of mobility and transportation and investigate the community resources related to mobility. Become informed about illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease, loss of hearing and vision, and aphasia. Education and information are important tools in alleviating the problems of abused elderly people.
- Address the faith concerns of the elderly, such as suffering, the providence of God, grace and vocation, the dignity of life, and death.
- Develop skills, or identify people in your congregation who already have the required skills to communicate with abused elderly persons, confused elderly persons, mentally disabled elderly persons.
- Learn about the resources in your community that are available to victims of elder abuse.
- Encourage various forms of lay ministry with the elderly in our churches and communities.
- Break the silence about elder abuse in our communities; explain issues related to abuse. Economic dependence is one issue. Mobility is another. In one church a deacon placed a wheel chair by the altar and, sitting there, he delivered his homily on aging. Many of us will find ourselves in such a chair late in life, he reminded the congregation. God's grace extends that far, and we are all ministers of that grace.

A Tool for Identifying Instances of Elder Abuse

The following check-list is designed to help pastoral care workers identify signs of elder abuse:⁹

1. Indicators of possible neglect:

- general appearance; clothing, hygiene, grooming
- nutrition; check for pallor, dry lips or sunken eyes or cheeks
- amount of time spent alone
- amount of assistance needed, and how often assistance is received
- is the elderly person satisfied with the assistance received?

2. Physical indicators of possible abuse:

- abrasions, bruises, burns, pain or tenderness fractures, welts, etc.
- behaviour toward caregiver; lack of physical contact, eye contact, or verbal contact.

3. Cognitive, emotional indicators of possible abuse:

- disorientation toward persons, place or time
- speech patterns; talkative or silent, loud or inaudible
- mood; apathetic, anxious, fearful, or depressed
- attitude toward pastoral care worker; defensive, evasive, or irritable?
- attitude toward caregiver; defensive, hostile or passive?

4. Assessment of caregiver:

- relationship to elderly person; relative, spouse other? Note: There is an overlap between wife assault and elder abuse, when an abused woman maintains the relationship with an abusive man into her old age.
- living arrangements; in the same house or apartment?

- relationship between elderly person and other persons living with caregiver; possible abuse by caregiver's spouse or children?
- sources of income
- sources of stress; caregiver suffers financial stress? lack of leisure time? marital discord? problems with children? lifestyle disrupted due to caregiving role?
- knowledge of elder person's needs and situation
- attitude toward elderly person; angry? critical? overconcerned? underconcerned?

Any or several symptoms or indicators can occur when no abuse has been suffered, but a pattern should alert a pastoral care worker to investigate whether elder abuse is occurring, and also to determine specific problem areas where the elderly person may want to make changes, i.e. regarding living arrangements, medical treatment, recreational activities, etc.

Empowerment and Self-Help

Information can be an elderly person's best protection against abuse, and it can be one of the pastoral care worker's most important tools. Explore what resources are already available to the elderly in your community, and make these known to the elderly person, so that a victim of abuse can decide what she or he wants to do about their situation. Remember that the choice about what is to be done should be their own.

Don't overlook important helping agencies that can be called upon at the victim's request, including:

The Police

Since abuse often involves a criminal offence such as assault, neglect, fraud, or theft, the police can be an important resource for an abused person. Advocates for the elderly have discovered that the police have sometimes shown an exceptionally high level of sensitivity and com-

passion toward the abused elderly, and that intervention by the police can help the perpetrator of abuse recognize that their behaviour is unacceptable.

Legal Clinics and Legal Aid

Issues such as the giving of one's power of attorney, the abuse of that power, disputes about mental competency, theft of cheques and other issues of abuse, probably require the expert advice of a legal worker. In cases of economic need, the local Legal Aid office can provide a person with a legal aid certificate so that he or she can get free legal advice and the assistance of a lawyer. As well as providing information directly related to abuse, legal advice might be required by a victim of abuse in order to straighten out their financial affairs. If the person is not mentally competent a Public Trustee may be appointed to protect their interests.

Some communities are developing "one-stop shopping" legal services for the elderly where concerns related to pensions and other benefits, taxes, financial planning, wills, housing requirements, as well as issues of abuse can be addressed. The advantages of such a system are obvious.

Public Health, The Victorian Order of Nurses, St. Elizabeth Visiting Nurses, Home-Makers, and Home Care

The public health department or the local public health nurse can be helpful in providing information and direct care to the elderly. The Victorian Order of Nurses can also provide ongoing care to meet an elderly person's nursing needs. Home-Makers can make regular visits to the home of an elderly person and perform regular household tasks as well as visit with the elderly person. In cases of need, some of these services may be obtained free of cost to the elderly person, or may be covered by health insurance if the service is prescribed by a doctor.

Local Senior Citizen Groups, Programs, Seniors' Centres, Services and Libraries

These vary greatly in each community and are completely lacking in some communities. See what's available in your community, and what can be started if no programs are available.

Supportive Housing Alternatives

Housing is a crucial issue in many cases of abuse. All the options should be presented and explored with the victim. Most elderly people fear institutionalization because it connotes a loss of privacy, autonomy and control. Unnecessary institutionalization, and the threat of institutionalization in order to maintain control of an elderly person, are forms of elder abuse. Therefore, alternatives should be carefully explored.

It is important to recognize that the placement of an elderly person in a nursing home does not guarantee that that person will no longer be subject to abuse by the family. Many people feel guilty that they were unable to care for an older person themselves so they avoid visiting him or her in the nursing home. This forced isolation of people in nursing care facilities constitutes a passive form of abuse.

The rights of residents in nursing homes are guaranteed under provincial laws in Canada, but vary from province to province. They generally include the right to a safe and clean environment, to adequate care, to a healthy diet and to adequate educational and recreational opportunities. In some provinces these rights also include the right to representation by a Residents' Council, and the right to remain in the home regardless of any conflicts with staff or degenerating health, until the resident can be discharged to a hospital or a more appropriate setting of his or her choice. While most special care facilities and nursing homes attempt to provide a high level of care to their residents, the residents may be quite isolated and vulnerable to abuse. Over-medication and unnecessary use of restraints are serious problems in some settings and instances of other forms of abuse by staff are not unheard of.

Attention must, therefore, be paid to the quality of care on an ongoing basis when an elderly person chooses to move into a nursing home.

Pastoral Intervention With an Abused Elderly Person

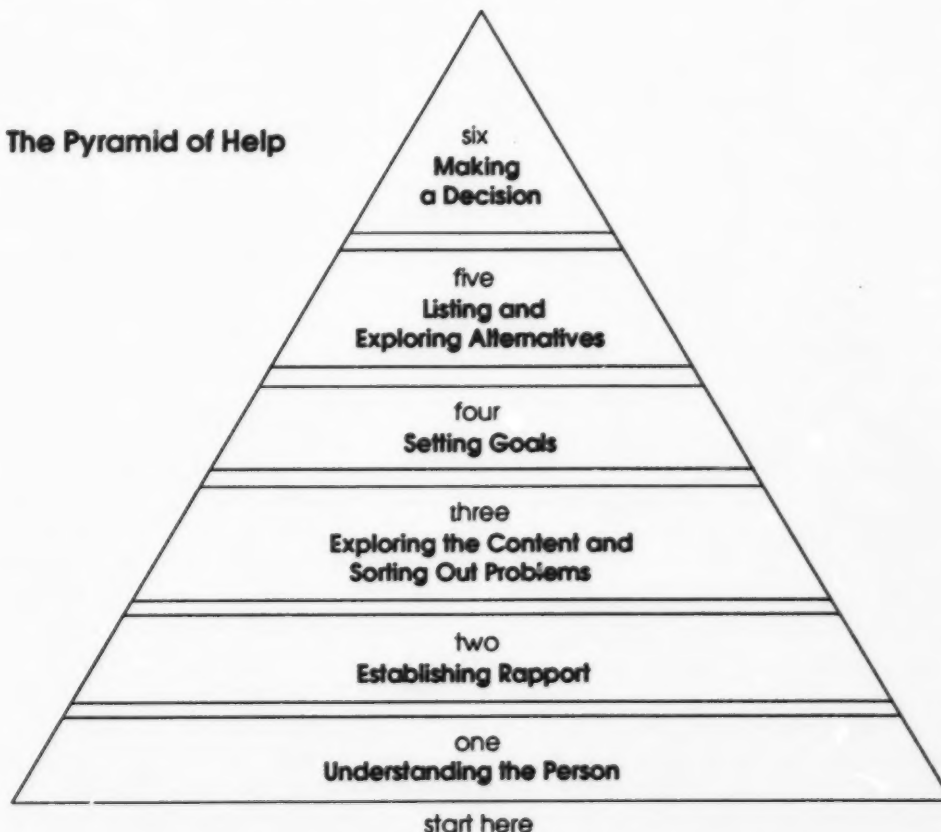
It must be recognized that with elder abuse, as in any form of abuse, the highest priority must be placed on ending the abuse so that the physical and psychological health of the victim is assured. A pastoral care worker needs to determine whether the elderly person is in immediate danger.

Appropriate crisis intervention in many cases of elder abuse parallels the process of intervention in cases of wife assault. In fact, many cases of

elder abuse are instances of wife assault and the method of intervention is the same as that outlined in the previous section on violence against women. If the person is in immediate danger of assault, **CALL THE POLICE.**

However, the victim of elder abuse, like victims of any abuse, should remain the decision-maker whenever possible. The steps toward reaching a decision are by and large the same as in any counselling situation. The process might take longer and require more skill, patience and wisdom on the part of the pastoral counsellor who has become aware that the elderly person is being abused, but the decision on how best to proceed remains that of the person experiencing abuse.

The Pyramid of Help



The Pyramid of Help: You can do it, Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Ontario, 1984.

A more general discussion of family violence and pastoral counselling will be found in the next section of this manual, but there are particular issues relating to the abused elderly that a pastoral counsellor needs to consider.

It is useful to keep in mind the "Pyramid of Help" when assisting an elderly person to end the abuse. It may be more helpful to conceive of the helping process as a spiral, since one must go through the process again and again, examining different options. Yet, the steps remain valid as moments in a process of gaining and maintaining control of one's life.

Steps One and Two require careful listening that is supportive and non-judgmental. Feelings need to be expressed as well as facts. If the elderly person is confused, the listener has to be particularly skilled. Three basic strategies might be helpful to the pastoral counsellor who is trying to listen and assist a confused elderly person:

- Try to help focus the person's attention on the visit, by reminding the person of your name, the purpose of the visit, the circumstances, etc.;
- Try to help foster the person's orientation to reality by calling the person by name, recalling or telling the bystanders in her/his presence who they are, introducing yourself by name, making a passing reference to the time of day or the weather, etc.;
- Strive to find the meaning in the person's expression and experiences.¹⁰

The **third step** seems so simple: defining the problem. The most obvious problem might be the physical abuse or theft, but as Arthur Becker points out,

"The important feature of this step is that the problem must be defined *by the person in the muddle*, not the family or a counselor. All of us know how irritating it is to have someone say to us, after we have expressed our frustra-

tion or fears, 'Well, the trouble with you is...' or 'What you ought to do is...' The older person feels this all the more because it is another form of infantilizing or patronizing, of making the older person feel useless and incompetent."¹¹

Similarly, in **setting goals** it is important that the goals are those of the elderly person, not those of the counsellor. However, a pastoral counsellor might be very helpful in exploring important faith issues.

A pastoral counsellor who has explored the resources within the community can provide valuable input in the fifth stage, when the elderly person explores his or her **alternatives**. The services of other professionals, such as health professionals, legal or financial counsellors or a social worker may be enlisted at this time.

When a person makes the final step, coming to a **decision** about what they want to do to correct the situation and then acting on the decision, the pastoral role is primarily to give support. Follow-up is also important. If the decision necessitates a move out of the area, the elderly person can still receive parish bulletins or a newsletter by mail so they can "keep in touch."

Pastoral Counselling for the Family of an Abused Elderly Person

As we noted earlier, the family may have experienced intense and conflicting feelings that triggered the abuse of an elderly person. Stress, financial need and intergenerational conflict may have precipitated the abuse. In some cases the abuser might have suffered abuse from the elderly person as well. A pastoral counsellor may be in a position to help the family understand that the commandment, "Honour your father and your mother," implies relationships of mutual respect and responsibility.

Often the pastoral counsellor may be able to help the abuser gain some objectivity on the family

situation and enable them to stop the abuse. In order to act effectively the counsellor must maintain a position of relative objectivity. As Becker explains:

"It is most helpful for the pastor to maintain this kind of position in the family system, in order to be able to gain the more accurate perception of what is going on and in order to avoid arousing the antagonism of any of the other members of the system, which might hamper a resolution. The position of pastors in the family system is much the same as in marriage conflict counseling. They must avoid "taking sides", because to do so simply polarizes positions and makes them more rigid and less susceptible to change. It is not an easy position to maintain, but it is important that both counselor and pastor do not quickly crusade for premature or uninformed change."

Obviously, this does not mean that the pastoral counsellor condones abuse. The safety of the elderly person must be assured, and criminal behaviour can be clearly identified as such and must stop. It does suggest, however, that the family system is complex, the dilemmas real, the resources sometimes scarce, and emotions are often running high. The pastoral counsellor may be the only person that the abuser, as well as the abused elderly person, can turn to for help in resolving these problems.

In Conclusion

Confronting elder abuse in our communities involves us in a process of advocating broad social change, as well enabling personal change in the lives of the elderly in our congregations. The need for developing and affirming lay ministries is clear. Volunteer workers, legal professionals, health-care workers, the elderly themselves are advocates or potential advocates of the rights and dignity of the elderly. Together, we offer a renewed vision of the value of life at all its stages.

Footnotes

1. Florida Scott-Maxwell, *The Measure of My Days*. Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, 1968, p.5.
2. *Ibid.*, p.139.
3. Joint study done by the Manitoba Council on Aging and the Manitoba Association on Gerontology, 1982, reported in a paper by Chris Edwards, *Elder Abuse - The Hidden Phenomenon*.
4. Nancy King, "Exploitation and Abuse of Older Family Members: An Overview of the Problem", in *Response to Violence in the Family & Sexual Assault*, Volume 6, Number 2, March/April 1983, p.11.
5. *Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly*, Health and Welfare Canada.
6. Arthur H. Becker, *Ministry with Older Persons; a Guide for Clergy and Congregations*, Augsburg Publishing House, p.70.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Adapted from *Aged Abuse* by Cornelia M. Beck and Doris Ferguson, College of Nursing, University of Arkansas.
9. This tool for identifying and assessing elder abuse was adapted from the tool developed by Margaret Ross, Penny Ross and Mary Ross-Carson and published by *The Canadian Nurse*. "Abuse of the Elderly", *The Canadian Nurse*, February 1985, pp.37-39.
10. Becker, *Ministry with Older Persons*, p.157-9.
11. *Ibid.*, p.150.

For notes

ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH

- We acknowledge that violence happens within our own families and communities;
- We confess that our church communities have often failed to serve the victims of that violence, contributing to the silencing of the victims and failing to challenge the perpetrators;
- We vow to be agents of change in our communities so that the violence will end;
- We are challenged to make many changes ourselves; to change ourselves and the style and content of our ministries, our liturgies and our programs in light of our commitment to end the violence.

Consciousness - Raising

Changes begin when we change our minds, as individuals and as a community. We need to become aware of violence in families, the extent of the violence, and of the personal, religious and social forces that contribute to violence within a family.

Consciousness-raising remains a most useful starting place for creating change. We can begin simply by examining our own personal experiences of family violence, by reading books and articles, screening films, talking with people, and visiting local women's shelters, hospitals and crisis centres.

There are a great many resources available to help individuals and groups start the process of consciousness-raising. Kits that include materials about group process as well as valuable information on issues of family violence have been designed specifically for church groups. Books, films and videos can be valuable tools. A catalogue of films and videos related to family violence is available through The National Film Board of Canada. (See Resources Section.)

As we begin consciousness-raising in our churches on issues of family violence there are a few things to remember. First, since we know that victims of wife abuse, child abuse and elder abuse are present in our church communities and in almost any group that meets within a church context, the words we use and the tone we set must ensure that we acknowledge this fact. Avoid setting up a dynamic that suggests that abuse is an issue "out there," rather than a personal experience, a lived reality, for members of the group or congregation. The us/them dynamic isolates victims of violence, silencing them and reinforcing their isolation.

Once the issues are raised, victims and perpetrators of violence may feel moved to disclose their own experiences and must be allowed to do so in the context of a loving community that respects

their rights and is willing to support them in making personal changes to end the violence. We have to be prepared to respond to disclosures lovingly, calmly, and affirmatively.

Consciousness-raising can begin in a church community in the following ways:

- Raise issues of family violence from the pulpit in sermons on forgiveness, peace, hope, social responsibility and family life. Be prepared to respond effectively to disclosures once the issue has been raised from the pulpit;
- Have people who are working directly with victims of wife assault, child abuse and elder abuse speak to groups in your church about their work;
- Form a small group to study one or several areas of concern related to family violence;
- Promote foster care as a family ministry and offer support to foster care providers;
- Raise family violence as an issue for all program staff and volunteers in your church and begin developing programs and protocols that are appropriate for your church community;
- Encourage church women to work as volunteers in women's shelters and men to undertake training to work with or start groups for abusers;
- Engage in ongoing theological reflection; examining the biblical, doctrinal and spiritual basis of our faith as it relates to issues of family violence;
- Affirm the efforts of women and men in the congregation who are already working to end violence in their own lives or in our communities. People working for better daycare, for more adequate and affordable housing, for equal pay for women, and for better support services for the elderly, are promoting healthy family life. Acknowledge the efforts of people who are working toward the goal of lessening economic dependencies within families, since their efforts are toward justice and peace.

Pastoral Counselling

Pastoral counsellors often play a key role in the

church community's response to family violence. The goal in pastoral counselling is to help a person achieve wholeness. This, of course, is an appropriate goal when counselling either the victim or perpetrator of violence. However, it must be recognized that the victim of violence most often needs an advocate to help them end the violence.

The more traditional psychological, spiritual or marital counselling methods are at best ineffective as long as the violence continues. Such counselling can even be life-threatening if it delays effective action taken to secure the victim's safety. Counselling becomes counter-productive when it focuses on the victim's subjective reality, leaving unchallenged the objective fact that she or he is being subjected to the perpetrator's abusive, perhaps criminal behaviour.

Another caution: in most cases of child abuse, wife abuse and elder abuse, professional services and psychological counselling are required. These services are different in kind and complementary to the role of pastoral counsellor whose main area of expertise is in the spiritual and religious dimensions of human experience; although they may also have professional training as counsellors.

Pastoral counsellors need to develop local coalitions with the professional workers in their area, with teachers, health care professionals, the police, etc. Such coalitions assist in providing continuing educational opportunities and in making appropriate referrals. It can be difficult to create a coalition in rural areas where there are limited resources, and sometimes the pastoral counsellor is forced to work outside their area of expertise. Nevertheless, it is important to be cognizant of one's limitations and to lobby for better resources where there is a lack.

When a person's life has been disrupted by violence which they have suffered at the hands of someone with whom they have an intimate rela-

tionship, the counselling process must serve the immediate goal of ending that violence. The victim of family violence is not attempting to resolve a personal problem; they are trying to break a pattern of criminal behaviour in which they are being victimized.

In general then, pastoral counselling with victims of family violence should be patterned after models of advocacy rather than the more passive models emphasizing human development. The victim needs to have their self-worth affirmed, to gain control of their lives, and to assert their rights to personal and legal protection so that their safety is assured. Neither the victim nor the assailant is free to work out their interpersonal problems as long as one person can resort to violence, or as long as the threat of violence is a factor in the relationship.

Specific guidelines for counselling victims and perpetrators of wife assault, child abuse and elder abuse were outlined in the previous section. Here are reviewed some basic problem-solving processes that may be helpful, particularly when other resources, such as those provided by a women's shelter, are not available in your community.

Review the "Pyramid of Help" in the section on elder abuse.

Step one - *understanding the person* - includes taking into consideration the faith or world view of the person being counselled, paying attention to their feelings, and what they are saying through body language as well as verbally. Remember that a victim of family violence often feels humiliated and ashamed about their experience. Provide helpful responses that affirm the person's self-worth.

Quality of Responses

Responses are either helpful or unhelpful. Helpful responses show respect for individuals and encompass their world view.

Helpful Responses

- respond to the stated feelings and content in an accepting manner
- indicate that the helper's verbal and non-verbal behavior is attentive
- respond to non-verbal cues
- respond to the intensity of the person's feelings.

An unhelpful response implies that the person is not ok.

Unhelpful Responses

- show little respect for the person's world view
- do not respect the person's feelings
- imply that the person shouldn't be feeling the way he or she is feeling
- put the person down
- come up with quick solutions
- give advice
- are spoken in a sarcastic and unfeeling manner
- try to top the person's story.

The Pyramid of Help, You can do it, Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Ontario, 1984

Secondly, the counsellor needs to *establish rapport* with the person seeking help. Make sure the person knows you want to help them, that you respect them and will respect the choices they make. You do not blame them for the violence. You want to help them end the violence.

Having established a trusting relationship, you can begin the third step of *exploring the content of the person's experience*, the abuse that they are suffering or are inflicting on a family member. Careful listening is required. Helpful questions free the victim of violence to break out of the silence and isolation they have suffered, so long as they don't feel bombarded.

Questioning

- Closed questions limit the person to a brief factual answer - often yes or no.
- Open questions are broad and let people find their own answers.

These are some of the ways that questions can be used when you are talking. When used in the right way, questions are a useful tool.

An Appropriate Question

- keeps the person on track
- encourages the person to continue talking
- clears up misunderstandings on the helper's part
- focuses on the person's feelings and behaviour
- provides an opportunity for the person to discover more about himself or herself.

Appropriate Questioning Leads To

- clarity
- trust
- non-defensiveness
- opening-up
- person reaching his or her own solution.

When used in the wrong way, questions may become a weapon.

The Pyramid of Help: You can do it, Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Ontario, 1984.

Step four, **setting goals**, is one that you might have to return to again and again as someone works their way out of an abusive situation. The goals must be those of the victim, not the counsellor's goals. It is often helpful to break the goals down into short-term and long-term goals, which makes the attainment of each goal more manageable.

Having set these goals, it is necessary to **explore alternatives**, listing ways in which the goals can be met. Information about what alternatives are available can be most useful at this stage. Care-

ful listening is required as the person seeking help examines the alternatives. It can be a very painful process for someone whose alternatives are limited, and one can easily feel overwhelmed. If the person seeking help starts to feel helpless, overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem, it may be helpful to review the goals and perhaps break them down further into more manageable stages.

Finally, the person seeking help has to **make a decision**, and no one can do that for another person. It is everyone's right, part of our inherent dignity, to decide for ourselves what we are going to do in our own lives, with our lives. A pastoral counsellor must affirm the person's right to do so, which means respecting their decision. This can be most difficult if a person decides to return to an abusive situation. Respecting that decision does not mean that we condone the violence; it means only that we acknowledge a person's right to make their own decision about what to do in the face of the violence they suffer. We can promise to remain with the person, and continue to offer them what protection and support is available.

Once the decision is made and the action taken, the counsellor needs to assure the person that the counsellor's support is ongoing. In the wake of violence, problems can come up over many years, faith questions need to be examined, and the victim's self-worth needs to be constantly reaffirmed. Healing may take years, perhaps a life-time, and the pastoral counsellor gives a tremendous gift to a victim of violence when they give the person the gift of their time.

Special Opportunities for Addressing and Preventing Family Violence

There are special occasions in regular church life where we have a unique opportunity to explore issues of family violence and perhaps prevent violence from ever occurring.

Marriage Preparation

Many churches have marriage preparation courses. Discussion about family violence can be built into the program. Materials should be free of sexist assumptions about a subservient role for women in marriage. Emphasize mutuality as a model for healthy marital relationships.

If a minister meets individually with couples preparing for marriage the issue of family violence can be addressed. People about to be married should be encouraged to explore their past experience of violence in their families of origin, to sort out their feelings about those experiences, and to seek professional counselling if problems remain unresolved.

Since a victim of sexual abuse might still be suffering from the effects of the abuse, and since those effects commonly affect the victim's intimate relationships, when preparing for marriage, a survivor of sexual abuse might want to acknowledge the abuse and seek professional counselling or explore his or her feelings with other survivors. The victim may choose to discuss it with the prospective partner as well. Open and frank discussion on the subject of sexual abuse can free a victim to seek out the support needed in working through the past experience.

If it is a second marriage for either partner, the minister should explore whether violence, abuse or control was an issue in the previous marriage. Also, one might ask direct questions about whether violence has occurred during the couple's courtship. Evidence suggests that a pattern of abuse often pre-dates the actual marriage. If abuse has already occurred, clearly the marriage should be discouraged.

Preparation for Baptism, Dedication, and Confirmation

In many denominations, preparation for a celebration or a sacrament of initiation into the church offers another opportunity to lend our support to victims of family violence. We can

provide resources and support for new parents as a means of preventing child abuse.

Also, keeping in mind that 40 per cent of wife assaults begin during the wife's first pregnancy,¹ we can be cognizant of some women's increased vulnerability to assault as they begin bearing children.

Sunday School, Youth Camps and Other Youth Ministries

Through our youth ministries and youth camps we can reach out to children who are abused or who witness their mothers being abused. Establish training sessions and protocols for youth ministers and Sunday school teachers in order to assist them in identifying and counselling victims of child abuse.

We can make prevention a part of our youth programs. There are a number of excellent programs designed for children to explore the difference between healthy sexual feelings and relationships, and unhealthy exploitative relationships. Through youth programs we can also work towards developing a sexual ethic among young people that emphasizes mutuality and love, rather than power and authority in intimate relationships.

In youth programs or in individual meetings between a minister or a teacher with children and their parents, frank discussion about issues of family violence can break the silence that isolates victims.

Mid-Week Groups

Church groups that meet regularly during the week sometimes seek out opportunities for continuing education on issues related to family life. Women's groups can explore issues of violence against women in intimate relations, and child abuse. Men's groups can explore their use or abuse of male privilege in the church and in the community at large. The kits listed in the Resource Section can be valuable tools for such groups.

Church councils and similar leadership bodies that meet regularly can engage in consciousness-raising about issues related to family violence, and can assess their church's ministries and educational programs in light of their new understandings.

Programs directed toward elderly members in the congregation, and groups that consist primarily of elderly persons or of people who are responsible for elderly people in their families, can address their own issues and examine the issue of elder abuse in their community. Such groups might discover their potential to be agents of change in the community, becoming effective lobbying groups for affordable housing and better services for the elderly.

Training of Lay Leadership

In the training of lay leaders within the church, issues of family violence should be addressed directly. Youth leaders, pastoral care teams, and people training for outreach ministries should be able to recognize when abuse or assaults have occurred, and be able to respond appropriately.

Volunteer Groups

When we commit ourselves to ending the violence that persists within families in our church communities, we are committing ourselves to hard work in areas of education, direct service, and politics. Some of this work can and must be done by professional staff, but much of the work is already being done by volunteers, and a greater volunteer effort is required.

Volunteer work is seen by many people as an important expression of their faith. Searching questions about the relationship between the volunteer sector and the professional social services sector have been raised. Historically and presently volunteers provide fresh insight and solutions to social and political issues because they are not constrained to serve the interests of an employer which, in the social services, is

often a government body. Yet, the role of volunteers needs to be carefully examined. Volunteer programs must be designed to assure that an improvement is being made through the volunteers' efforts. Volunteers with minimal training should not replace highly trained professionals when a government makes cutbacks in its social service programs. Sometimes volunteer work done in the political arena, rather than in direct service to victims and perpetrators of violence, is more effective in meeting our goals of justice and the prevention of family violence. The locus of volunteer energy needs constant evaluation.

The volunteer effort already made by people in our churches needs to be affirmed. Volunteers sometimes do not get the recognition, training and support they need and deserve. This situation must be addressed. Good training programs and ongoing support for volunteers is essential. Volunteers must be given concrete support (i.e. provided with child-care, money for transportation, etc.), as well as emotional support and spiritual nourishment, so that they can continue this most important work.

Liturgy and Worship

In our worship services we have an opportunity collectively to confess and confront family violence as a social and religious problem with deep spiritual implications. We can break the silence that surrounds issues of family violence, and we can begin to discover new language and ways of imaging God that liberate us from that violence.

Ways in which we can, through our liturgies, act on our commitment to end family violence include:

- Preaching on the subject of family life and the fact of family violence in our church communities, especially in relationship to particular scriptural texts that are used to justify violence and texts that challenge violent family dynamics;
- Opening prayers, general intercessions and

prayers asking for forgiveness for our failure to serve victims of wife abuse, child abuse and elder abuse and to commit ourselves to a common cause of ending the violence;

- Using language that is inclusive rather than language that reinforces male dominance as a dynamic within the Christian community. Using images for God that are female as well as male is also helpful. For instance, the image of God as Father may not be as helpful to a child who has been sexually assaulted by her father as would the biblical image of God as the loving hen who protects her chicks or the image of the Good Shepherd;
- Developing new rituals to celebrate a victim's passage from victimization to freedom from fear, to celebrate new understandings, or to affirm a group's love for and commitment to one another in a particular area of work or learning. Music, healing rituals, candles, silence, and dance can be incorporated into these celebrations. It is usually appropriate to have these celebrations in small groups so that everyone's privacy can be respected.

New Models of Ministry

To be effective agents of change in the Christian churches we need to develop new models of ministry, and to re-examine the existing models. Many existing models of ministry emphasize the ministry of the professional church worker, but this emphasis tends to reinforce concepts of power and responsibility that contradict the models of mutuality and accountability we seek to create within communities of faith.

Ministry is the work of people of faith. Part of that work is done by the clergy who perform the traditional ministry of Word and Sacrament in terms of liturgy, interpretation of scripture, in pastoral counselling and in providing leadership for theological reflection on issues of family violence. Significant ministry to families broken by violence is also being done by lay people

in the church. It includes providing support to families in crisis, offering comfort, shelter or simply listening to the stories of abused children, assaulted women, and abused elderly. It also includes the professional work of teachers, counsellors, health professionals, police and social workers.

All this work needs to be acknowledged and affirmed within the churches. The affirmation can be concretized through prayer and through formation of support groups that afford people the opportunity to reflect theologically on the efforts they are making to alleviate the problems of family violence.

We also have to develop new models of ministry in order to serve the victims of family violence more effectively within our church communities. Arthur H. Becker, in his book *Ministry with Older Persons* recommends a "triad of innovative ministries" that can serve as a model for a wider ministry to victims of family violence. The triad emphasizes lay ministry and includes:

The ministry of information and referral. Those performing this ministry need to have good organizational and communication skills. Their function is to gather information on the resources that are available in the community, to link people with the resources available, and to communicate information to the congregation at large. Their role would also include identifying cases of abuse and helping the victims of abuse link up with the available resources.

The ministry of the ombudsman or ombudswoman is closely related to the ministry of information and referral. Becker explains, "the particular functions of the ombudsman (or ombudswoman) are: to serve as a 'cutter of red tape'." These people develop contacts within the agencies and social service networks, and advise and lead the person through the bureaucratic maze in an effort to get help.

The ministry of advocacy. Since we recognize

God's passion for justice as well as for mercy, we need ministers within our community who promote justice actively and concretely. Becker comments, "Every Christian congregation ought to become known in the community and neighborhood as a place where those who are concerned for justice gather to worship the Lord of justice. Every congregation ought to be a haven where anyone - and particularly the elderly, because they are so often victims of injustice - might go for recourse to get justice." The functions of an advocate include the correction of injustice, the pursuit of justice, and the prevention of injustice. The advocate will work locally to assure the availability of resources to victims of family violence; will work through the legal system to assure that justice is served; and will work through the political processes to assure that the health and safety of children, women and the elderly become a much higher priority in our society.²

Creating a Community of Love and Support

The greatest contribution the Christian churches might make toward ending violence and abuse in families is to create a community of love and support where everyone's dignity is respected, where they can gather, tell their stories and be healed from any injury incurred in their most intimate relationships.

Such a community models relationships of mutuality and respect. Our sexuality is seen as an aspect of ourselves to be celebrated. It no longer can be viewed in terms of power and control.

Children are cherished and allowed to speak in such a community. They are no longer forced to keep secrets that can poison their lives. They are heard, protected and allowed to grow into their authentic selves.

The elderly share in the wealth of the community, materially, intellectual and spiritually. The gift of greater experience is freely offered and

gratefully received. Old age is understood as a period of growth, as is every stage of life.

When we face the challenge of ending violence in families by hearing each other, by believing what is said or what is clear, yet unspoken, and when we respond appropriately in the context of a faithful community, our personal and collective healing begins.

Footnotes

1. D.G. Dutton, (Dept. of Psychology, University of British Columbia), quoted from the *Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare and Social Affairs: Inquiry into Violence in the Family*, 25:6, Feb. 1982.

2. Arthur H. Becker, *Ministry with Older Persons; A Guide for Clergy and Congregations*. Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1986, pp.191-197.

Worksheets

Directory of Local Services

The following directory is designed to help you investigate local agencies and services. Keep a list of individuals whom you find knowledgeable and sympathetic. Explore with them what other community services are available.

Police

Phone: _____

Officer to contact in cases of wife assault _____

Officer to contact in cases of child abuse _____

Officer to contact in cases of elder abuse _____

Women's Shelter

Phone: _____

Contact for emergency shelter _____

Contact for counselling women _____

Contact for counselling children _____

NOTE: Some communities have shelters that serve Native women or immigrant women exclusively.

Rape Crisis Line or Crisis Centre

Phone: _____

Community Legal Clinic Legal Aid Office

Phone: _____

Child Advocates _____

Children's Protective Services (Children's Aid Society or Family and Children's Services)

Phone: _____

Contact Person _____

Hospital
Emergency
Ambulance

Phone: _____
Phone: _____
Phone: _____

Health Care Professionals sympathetic to
Abused women _____

Children _____

Elderly _____

Check whether the hospital runs programs for abused women, children and the elderly. Some hospitals will photograph injuries and collect evidence for use in court if they are alerted to the fact that an assault has occurred.

Public Health Nurse _____

Mental Health Clinic _____

Homemakers Programs _____

Visiting Nursing Programs _____

Other Services _____

The protection plans on the following pages were developed by the Catholic Family Development Centre, Thunder Bay, Ontario in recognition of the fact that once violence has occurred it is likely to escalate. If a victim of violence cannot, or chooses not to remove themselves immediately, then a pastoral care worker can offer these to the victim as a means of preventing further violence.

Protection Plan

For use by Women and the Elderly in Abusive Situations

Research and experience show that violence repeats itself and gets worse. Now is the time to plan what to do if there is further violence. A protection plan gives you a way to safeguard yourself and your children, both by using personal and community resources and by becoming aware of signs that usually precede your partner's violent actions. Keep this paper, when completed, in a private place.

1. What are some of your internal warning signals that tell you that you may be in danger?

2. What are some external circumstances leading up to an explosive situation in your home? (e.g: time of day, chemical use, money, children, location, partner's cues, outside stresses, etc.)

3. How have you protected yourself and/or your children from being hurt in the past? How effective was it?

4. The following are people or organizations that you can turn to for help:

Personal

Friends _____

Relatives _____

Neighbours _____

		Place	Phone
Shelters:	Women	Women's Shelter or Community Residence	_____ _____ _____
	Men	Emergency Shelter	_____ _____ _____
Medical:	Hospital Emergency Services - 911		_____ _____
Police:			_____

Protection Plan

For use by Adolescents

I. List some of the ways you can tell that there may be abuse in your home:

(a) Circumstances (e.g: arguing about bills; chemical use; who will discipline the children; dinnertime/weekends...):

(b) Cues observed from father's behaviour (e.g: clenching fists; pacing floor; coming home late...):

(c) Cues observed from mother's behaviour (e.g: trying to keep things around house in order; more silence...):

(d) Cues from yourself (e.g: feelings, thoughts or self-talk, actions...):

(e) Others:

II. What have you done in the past when there has been violence?

Things I did

How it helped me feel safe

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

III. What will you do in the future to feel protected and safe?

Things I can do

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

People to call for help

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Resources

The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence provides resources to organizations and individuals on issues of Wife Assault, Child Abuse and Elder Abuse. The staff can put you in touch with related government agencies. Contact:

National Clearinghouse on
Family Violence
Health and Welfare Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, 7th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 1B5

The National Film Board of Canada provides a catalogue of films available on many aspects of family violence. The films are available free of charge. Only the shipping and handling charges are billed to the borrower. The Head Office and Regional NFB offices are as follows:

Head Office, Operational Headquarters
Montreal, PQ (514) 283-9000

Mailing Address:
PO Box 6100
Montreal, PQ H3C 3H5

Street and Shipping Address:
3155 Cote de Liesse Road
Saint-Laurent, PQ H4N 2N4

Cable Address:
Canafilm, Montreal, Canada

National Capital
150 Kent Street, Suite 642
Ottawa, ON K1A 0M9
Office: (613) 996-4863
Film Library: (613) 995-4861

Atlantic Region
1572 Barrington Street
Halifax, NS B3J 1Z6
Office: (902) 426-6000
Film Library: (902) 426-6001

Quebec Region
Complexe Guy-Favreau
200 Dorchester Blvd. W.
East Tower, Room 102
Montreal, PQ H2Z 1X4
(514) 283-4823

Ontario Region
Mackenzie Building
1 Lombard Street Toronto,
ON M5C 1J5
(416) 973-9093

Prairie Region
245 Main Street Winnipeg,
MB R3C 1A7
Office: (204) 949-4129
Film Library: (204) 949-4131

Pacific Region
1045 Howe Street
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2B1
Office: (604) 666-3938
Film Library: (604) 666-5410

The Regional Office will inform you if there is a district office near you.

Resource Kits for Church Groups

Several excellent kits are now available which may be appropriate for groups in congregations or professional associations. These include:

Breaking the Pattern: How Alberta Communities Can Help Assaulted Women and their Families from the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, 9th Floor, South Tower, 10030-107 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4.

An excellent tool for consciousness-raising and community organizing to be used over an extended period of time. Includes materials for analyzing existing community resources and planning for community development.

Broken Promises: An Educational Workshop on Wife Abuse by the Division for Church and Society and the Evangelical Lutheran Women, ELCIC, 1512 St. James Street, Winnipeg, MB R3H 0L2.

A well planned resource for short workshops; includes useful hand-outs and a poster for publicity.

Family Violence: a Workshop Manual for Clergy and Other Service Providers by Marie M. Fortune and Denise Hormann, for the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 4250 South Mead St., Seattle, WA 98118.

A useful tool for consciousness-raising through a group process. Focus is on wife assault in the U.S. context.

Family Violence in a Patriarchal Society: A Challenge to the Church from The Church Council on Justice and Corrections, Canadian Council on Social Development.

Primarily reprinted articles. Highly theoretical. A user's guide and audio-tape will be included in its revised form.

Hands to End Violence Against Women from Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 77 Charles Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1K5.

A comprehensive study guide for use in theological education and continuing education workshops. Includes material for in-depth theological reflection, and for practical application.

One in Ten, 60 minute video cassette, available from denominational sources.

A 3-part documentary for use with clergy and lay people. The first part defines and describes wife assault, the second examines the way the secular community has responded, and the third looks at the church's response. The accompanying guide is both a training program and a consciousness-raising tool.

The Purple Packet: Domestic Violence Resources for Pastoring Persons from the Mennonite Central Committee Domestic Violence Task Force, 2205-1317 A Portage Ave. Winnipeg, MB R3G 0V3.

While the focus of the kit is on wife assault there are some good pieces on child abuse and related concerns.

Annotated Bibliography

General

Heyward, Carter, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality and Justice*. The Pilgrim Press, New York, 1984.

Carter Heyward is an educator, activist, Episcopal priest, justice worker, and writer. This book is a collection of her essays, sermons, lectures, and liturgical poetry which challenge the reader to re-think/re-image understandings of power, sexuality, and liberation in ways that are loving, just, and life-giving.

Miller, Alice, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Childrearing and the Roots of Violence*. Farrar, Straus, Gioux, New York, 1983.

A ground-breaking psychoanalytic text exploring the relationship between family violence and political violence. Academic but accessible for in-depth study.

Spretnak, Charlene, ed., *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*. Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1982.

Subtitled "Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement," this collection includes essays by a number of well-known women of faith addressing a range of issues that are informed by spirituality, our attitude toward life on earth. It includes important segments on manifesting personal power, the unity of politics and spirituality, and applications of spirituality as a political force.

Wife Assault

Bussert, Joy M.K., *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment*. Division for Mission in North America: Lutheran Church in America, 1986.

Joy Bussert is an ordained Lutheran pastor who has worked extensively in the shelter movement with battered women. This book deals with the theological roots of violence and of sexism, recounts ways in which Christian theology and tradition has legitimated women's suffering, and points to a Christian ethic based on equality, self-determination, and justice.

Currie, David, *The Abusive Husband: An Approach to Intervention*. Available free of charge from The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence in Ottawa.

An assessment and treatment manual written for those working with abusive husbands. The book includes a theoretical overview, description of a treatment program, and a number of assessment and evaluation protocols in such a program.

Fortune, Marie, *Keeping the Faith: Questions and Answers for the Abused Woman*. Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1987.

This pocket-sized book addresses theological, biblical, and spiritual questions most frequently asked by women who are being abused by male partners. It also includes prayers and meditations, suggestions for the abused woman and suggestions for pastoral care workers and friends who want to be

supportive. Marie Fortune is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle, Washington.

NiCarthy, Ginny, *Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships*. Seal Press, Washington, 1982.

A self-help manual for women. Includes information and exercises to help with clear thinking, to examine options, and to make free and informed decisions in the aftermath of abuse and assault.

NiCarthy, Ginny, *Talking It Out: A Guide to Groups for Abused Women*. Seal Press, Washington, 1984.

This is an excellent book on running support groups for assaulted women. It provides good support and insight into group leaders' needs. It looks at special issues for women, e.g. alcoholism problems, teen women, women of colour. There are exercises and techniques for esteem building for every woman. A must for anyone doing group leadership for women.

Sinclair, Deborah, *Understanding Wife Assault: A Training Manual for Counsellors and Advocates*. Available from Ontario Government Bookstore, Publications Service Section, 880 Bay Street, Toronto, ON M7A 1N8. (\$4.00)

A training manual for counsellors and advocates providing a great deal of well-organized information.

Child Abuse

Hyde, Margaret, *Sexual Abuse: Let's Talk About It*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1984.

A calm and accessible discussion of the sexual abuse of children, particularly good for parents and people first approaching the issue.

Mayhall, Pamela D. and Katherine Eastlack Norgard, *Child Abuse and Neglect: Sharing Responsibility*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1983.

A comprehensive study of all areas of child abuse and neglect, with clear social analysis and useful information for professionals.

Van Stolk, Mary, *The Battered Child in Canada*. Revised Edition, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1978.

A well-organized examination of child abuse in Canada. Van Stolk presents case profiles that illuminate the individual child's tragedy and carries the analysis further to examine the broader social and cultural implications of violence suffered by children.

Elder Abuse

Becker, Arthur H., *Ministry with Older Persons: A Guide for Clergy and Congregations*. Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1986. (220 pages, \$18.15)

An excellent handbook for pastoral workers, dealing with issues ranging from the tasks and realities of aging, its losses and gains, and the ability of the elderly to learn, through faith and ethical concerns, to matters of personal and family counselling and programming. An

insightful, compassionate, and helpful resource.

Episcopal Society for Ministry on Aging ed., *Affirmative Aging: A Resource for Ministry*. Winston Press, Minneapolis, 1985.

An impressive group of writers including Claudia and Leighton Cluff, Herbert O'Driscoll, and Charles J. Fahey have contributed to this collection of essays on spirituality and aging. The book, which is both informative and inspiring, addresses such themes as: aging as a spiritual journey; inter-generational relationships; and ministry opportunities for older persons. A valuable resource for ministry, or for individual reading.

Newsletters

Canadian Child Welfare Association Newsletter, 2211 Riverside Drive, Suite 401, Ottawa, ON K1H 7X5.

Child Sexual Abuse Newsletter, Society for Children and Youth of B.C., 3644 Slocan Street, Vancouver, BC V5M 3E8.

Newsletter of the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse, 25 Spadina Road, Toronto, ON M5R 2S9.

Working Together to Prevent Sexual and Domestic Violence, Centre for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1914 N. 34th, Suite 105, Seattle, WA 98103.

Vis-a-Vis: A National Newsletter on Family Violence, Canadian Council on Social Development, Family Violence Program, 55 Parkdale Ave., PO Box 3505, Station C, Ottawa, ON K1Y